THE STORY OF BARDOLI

Being a History of Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928 and its sequel

MAHADEV DESAI





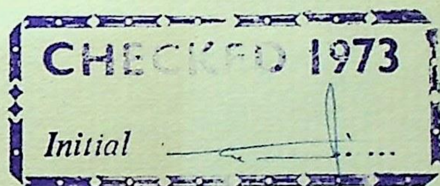


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BEING A HISTORY OF THE BARDOLI SATYAGRAHA OF 1928 AND ITS SEQUEL

By

MAHADEV DESAI



" And littleness united
Is become invincible."

—MATTHEW ARNOLD





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PREFACE

I never had the privilege of taking part as "a combatant" in the Bardoli Satyagraha, which, whilst it was on, "paralysed the revenue administration" in the taluka, which made the taluka the cynosure of all eyes as much by its intensity as by its essentially peaceful character, and which in its result proved to be "a blow to the regime of the Indian Civil Service." But I had certainly enough work as a "non-combatant" in the Satyagraha army, and because of my close association with the Sardar of the campaign had the pleasure and privilege of witnessing some of the moving scenes described in the following pages. The narrative therefore is an authentic and somewhat intimate record. As such it is likely to be of some value to all those who are interested in the method of Satyagraha as a weapon to secure justice and freedom.

I have purposely omitted so far as possible the names of all the subordinate officials who played their part in the campaign. The writing in these pages may not perhaps reveal a pen dipped in the ink of love,—a positive and a most difficult virtue— but I hope there is nothing in the book which has the slightest trace of rancour or malice. The very battle was fought by a people utterly lacking in the spirit of hostility as the Broomfield Committee was agreeably surprised to testify.

Part I brings the narrative down to the close of the Satyagraha. Part II deals with the Enquiry and its result.

M. D.



Contents

PART II

Appendices

List of Illustrations

GLOSSARY

Revenue Facts and Revenue Terms

1. Bombay is a Ryotwari Province, *i. e.*, a Province made up of numerous peasant proprietors holding land directly under Government and paying a fixed revenue levied on every survey number.

2. Section 107 of the Bombay Land Revenue Code often referred to in the Book:

> "In revising assessments of land revenue regard shall be had to the value of land and, in the case of land used for the purposes of agriculture, to the profits of agriculture:
>
> Provided that if any improvement has been effected in any land during the currency of any previous settlement made under this act, or under Bombay Act I of 1865, by or at the cost of the holder thereof, the increase in the value of such land or in the profit of cultivating the same due to the said improvement, shall not be taken into account in fixing the revised assessment thereof."

Assessment—Amount payable under the law by a substantive holder of the land.

Collector—Officer in charge of the revenue admininistration of a district.

Commissioner—Revenue head of one of the three divisions of the presidency.

Holding—Total land held or cultivated by an agriculturist.

Leased area—Area not cultivated by the substantive holders themselves but leased out to tenant cultivators.

Revision—Revision of settlement of land revenue occuring every thirty years.

Rent—Amount paid by a lessee to a lessor for the right of cultivating the latter's land.

Survey number—Portion of land of which area and assessment are separately recorded.

Tenant—A lessee holding land, under an instrument or oral agreement, from a substantive holder. 'Tenant' never means a lessee holding directly under Government.

Vernacular Words

Anavla—A class of Brahmans.

Bania (or Vania)—Class doing trading and money lending.

Chothai—Fine amounting to 25 per cent. of assessment on default.

Japti—Attachment.

Japti Officer—Officer entrusted with attachment processes.

Kaliparaj—A backward community referred to as such in Government Reports, 'kali' meaning dark, 'paraj' people, as distinguished from 'ujali paraj,' fair people.

Khalsa—Forfeiture.

Khata—Holding.

Khatedar—Occupant of land holding directly under Government on payment of a fixed revenue.

Mahal—Defined portion of a taluka placed in charge of an officer, slightly lower in grade than a Mamlatdar.

Mahalkari — Officer in charge of a Mahal.

Mamlatdar — Chief officer entrusted with the local revenue administration of a taluka.

Patel — Village headman.

Raniparaj — Same as Kaliparaj, meaning 'Forest People.' Name given to the people by the reformers as free from the inferiority and contempt attaching to the term 'Kaliparaj.'

Savkar — Moneylender (corresponding to the Russian *kulak*).

Talati — Subordinate officer in charge of the collection of revenue of a village.

Taluka — Administrative division of a district.

Vania — See *Bania*.

Vethia — Village peon.





MAP OF BARDOLI TALUKA

⊞ SHOWING KASBA VILLAGE

⊕ SATYAGRAHA CAMPS

● ATTACHMENTS AND PENALTY NOTICES AND TOPOGRAPHICAL POSITION

— FORFEITURE NOTICES

⁑ LANDS DECLARED FORFEITED AND SOLD

1-47 NUMERALS INDICATE PLACES VISITED BY THE BROOMFIELD COMMITTEE AND THEIR ORDER

Scale 3 inches=8 miles



The Story of Bardoli

PART I

CHAPTER I

BARDOLI AND ITS PEOPLE

"Bardoli came 'on the map' quite suddenly and does not quite realise its position."

— *The Pioneer*

BARDOLI (including Valod) is the easternmost Taluka of the Surat district containing 137 villages, with an area of 222 square miles. It is bounded on the north by the river Tapti, beyond which is the Mandvi taluka of the Surat district, on the east and west by the territory of His Highness the Gayakwad of Baroda and on the south partly by the same territory and the Jalalpur taluka of the Surat district. The fact that a large part of the boundary of the taluka is formed by the Baroda territory is a feature of which the reader will notice the significance as he goes through the history of the Satyagraha. Two or three rivers much smaller than the Tapti cut through the taluka and run into the Arabian sea. Scarcely any of them is bridged, or fordable in the thick of the rainy season. The soil in the western part of the taluka is rich black yielding all varieties of crops (the staples being, *juvari*, cotton and rice), but the eastern villages are wild and rocky and poor, and have a scanty water supply and an inferior climate.

The bulk of the population of something over 87,000 are agriculturists. One looks in vain in the old settlement reports of the taluka for accurate figures of

the population as divided into the principal communities—the Kanbis, Anavlas, Vanias and the Kaliparaj (now known as the Raniparaj). But according to a rough estimate over half of the population is accounted for by the Kaliparaj, 11,000 being the Kaliparaj proper and thirty to forty thousand Dublas. There is a sprinkling of Parsis and a small percentage of Musalmans. The first two communities are occupants and cultivators of the soil, the bulk of the Vanias are moneylenders and may be classed under the term non-agriculturists, and the Kaliparaj (including Chodhras, Dhudias, Gamits and Dublas) are the agricultural labourers in the taluka. The Dublas however are a class apart, and there is very little that is voluntary about their labour. They get married at the expense of their masters, get into their debt, and remain attached to the masters practically as their serfs. The Musalmans are also agriculturists, though some of them carry on petty trades, and the few families of Parsis in the taluka are canteen keepers and occupants of large holdings.

An average village in the Bardoli taluka is very much smaller than a village in the Kheda district. Some of the Bardoli villages have as few as twenty-five or even ten houses, and though the density of population in the western villages is fairly high, there is nothing like the congestion that one finds in a Kheda village. The houses of the 'higher' classes are tiled, have a front and back door and have large enclosures, but curiously enough the people accommodate their cattle also under the same roof as themselves.

These salient features indicate nothing unusual about the taluka. But one has to examine a little deeper to find out the distinctive features which

have contributed to give Bardoli its place in the history of India.

Quite a considerable number of Gandhiji's Satyagrahis in South Africa were from Bardoli, and they had during that historical struggle given enough evidence of their courage and their determination. These included Kanbis, Anavlas and Musalmans who went there to try their fortune and who have built up a considerable colony there. It was his familiarity with these Satyagrahis of Bardoli that led Gandhiji to approve of Bardoli as a suitable area in which to start his campaign of mass Civil Disobedience in 1921-1922. The idea had to be dropped abruptly for reasons with which we are not here concerned, but the fact that it had the honour of being thus selected as the starting point of one of the biggest experiments in history remained, and though there was an inevitable lull among the people as a result of a sudden call-off of marching orders, the implications of the proposed step were not forgotten. Almost all the Patels in the taluka (most of them belonging to the Kanbi community) had delivered their letters of resignation to Gandhiji to be sent to the proper quarters at the opportune moment. Many villages had their national schools, and there was a better Khadi atmosphere in the taluka than elsewhere. A strong wave of social reform had passed over the Kaliparaj community, a large number of whom had taken solemn pledges to abjure liquor, toddy, etc. After Gandhiji's arrest the workers of Gujarat headed by Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel made it their objective to carry out the constructive programme in Bardoli, so that it might vindicate itself in history as the first place for Civil Disobedience chosen by Gandhiji. Four centres of work were therefore established in four directions of the taluka,

where some of the picked workers went and settled themselves to work among the people. These centres were at Bardoli, Sarbhon, Varad and Vankaner, places which have distinguished themselves in the Satyagraha of 1928. Bardoli was the headquarters of their constructive activity, as it is the headquarters of the taluka, with a special technical school of spinning, weaving and carpentry for the boys and youths of the Kaliparaj people. I have in a foregoing paragraph described these people by another name—Raniparaj. It has a history behind it. 'Kaliparaj' means 'the darker people' or 'the backward people.' It was however resolved at a conference of these people held under Gandhiji's presidentship in 1926, that the contemptuous appellation should be dropped,—especially because they had made rapid strides in self-purification,—and that they should be described by their correct name—Raniparaj, meaning forest-dwellers. Ever since constructive work among these people has been making considerable headway, every year they have been having conferences and Khadi exhibitions, the models of their kind, and thanks to the efforts of Sjt. Chunilal Mehta and his wife, who have consecrated themselves to the service of this community, there are numerous people amongst them who live purer lives than their more fortunate brethren in the taluka. Many of their families spin and weave their own yarn, have abjured drink and exercise a great moral influence over the rest of their people. The school for the boys of the community under Sjts. Lakshmidas Purushottam and Jugatram Dave has turned out quite a number of workers who have gone into the villages to act as leaven to raise the lump.

The centres at Sarbhon and Varad did not quite fulfil the workers' expectations, but they persevered in

their work with a doggedness worthy of their cause. Sjt. Jhaverbhai Patel who was in charge of the national school at Varad performed the feat of spinning a million and twenty thousand yards of yarn in a year, besides attending to his school work. Sjt. Narahari Parikh, who in 1926 wrote a series of articles in which he subjected Sjt. Jayakar's Settlement Report of the Bardoli taluka to a searching examination after a close and thorough inquiry in a number of villages, was for a long time in charge of the Ashram at Sarbhon, and on one occasion fasted for seven days, because the people of a village under his charge would not make amends for their cruel behaviour towards the Dublas working as their agricultural serfs.

The work that followed Gandhiji's imprisonment and release thus bound the villagers to the workers with a tie of indissoluble union which always made the former look to the latter whenever they were in difficulty.

Apart from this, certain natural characteristics of the people which specially fitted them for any movement of uplift are also worth noting. Possibly no other taluka has got a population which is so amenable to healthy influences as are the Kanbis and the Raniparaj of Bardoli. The industry, skill and thrift of the Kanbi agriculturist of Bardoli are proverbial, and the simple, truth-loving Raniparaj make it a pleasure and a privilege to work amongst them and for them. The women of the Kanbi community do not disdain to work with the men in the fields, and are genuine partners in their labours and their troubles. Their frank and open faces bear a natural stamp of purity which carries its fragrance wherever they go. The whole community are by nature God-fearing, if also

superstitious, and have a sense of sacredness about their pledges and their vows. Their caste organisations have stood the ravages of the modern civilization and make them a community more closely knit than any other in Gujarat. As for the Raniparaj it would be impossible to find a more innocuous and guileless community. As a result both the communities, as also the other communities whose lot has been cast with them, are the most law-abiding in Gujarat. There is very little litigation in Bardoli which has not got the usual munsif's civil court, and the percentage of crime is very low. No wonder that Satyagraha should have found a congenial soil in Bardoli.

"In a righteous struggle God himself plans campaigns and conducts battles," says Gandhiji in his *Satyagraha in South Africa*. "A *dharmayuddha*, in which there are no secrets to be guarded, no scope for cunning and no place for untruth, comes unsought, and a man of religion is ever ready for it. A *dharmayuddha* can only be waged in the name of God, and it is only when the Satyagrahi feels quite helpless, is apparently on his last legs and finds utter darkness all around him, that God comes to the rescue. God helps when one feels oneself humbler than the very dust under one's feet. Only to the weak and helpless is divine succour vouchsafed."

The very weakness or meekness of the Bardoli peasant proved his qualification for offering Satyagraha to the most haughty Government on earth.

CHAPTER II

THE BLEEDING PROCESS

"The main concern of the rulers of India is not the improvement of the condition of the people, but the increase of the sources from which revenue can be drawn."

— *Keir Hardie*

BEFORE I proceed to describe the genesis of the Bardoli Satyagraha a brief recounting of the salient facts about the question of the land revenue assessment appears to be necessary. I do not propose to take the reader through the long history of land surveys and land settlements, nor do I propose to inflict on him a discussion as to the nature of land revenue. I shall content myself with summarising certain facts which are essential for a reader of this history to know.

Whether land revenue is a 'tax' or a 'rent' is a question which once used to be dispassionately discussed by high-placed officials of Government. The theory, that the State is the proprietor of the soil, and that the revenue it levies is not a tax but a rent, was once recognised as contrary to authoritative declarations made by the Court of Directors in 1856 and by Lord Lytton's Government in 1880. An experienced civilian like Baden Powell admitted in his work on land systems, that "the land revenue cannot then be considered as a rent, not even in Ryotwari lands where the law happens to call the holder of

land an 'occupant' and not a proprietor. . . . If we cannot be content to speak of land revenue and must further define, I should be inclined to regard the charge as more in the nature of a tax on agricultural income." But the same writer also said that it was profitless to discuss the question. It does indeed seem to be profitless, not because it is an unimportant question, but because the Government have rendered the discussion profitless by nullifying its implications. Otherwise it is a most important question, inasmuch as a recognition by Government that land revenue is nothing more than a tax would solve many questions of vital importance. The fact is, that Government have all the while maintained their proprietorship of the soil. The Finance Member to the Government of Bombay declared as late as March 1924, that "it cannot be denied that the land belongs to the State, and that its possession forms one of the most valuable assets, from the proceeds of which the administration is carried on," and all the evils of the existing revenue system which may be summed up in its outrageously arbitrary character arise out of this pernicious dogma. They may exact as much as they need, land worth thousands of rupees may be confiscated in recovery of arrears of a few rupees, no civil court may question the decision of a revenue official recommending the assessment, and no legislature may disturb the decision of the Government,—because Government are the proprietor of the soil, and the ryot is not entitled to any protection as of right! But as we have said above, the discussion is futile.

The next point that the reader should bear in mind is the steady and enormous increase in the revenue demand in all provinces where the revenue has not been permanently settled. In the early sixties

the question whether the land revenue should be permanently settled was seriously mooted, and Viceroys like Lord Canning and Lord Lawrence considered it most desirable both in the interests of the State and the people that land revenue should be permanently settled. By a dishonest manipulation however, the recommendation was never given effect to, and a later Government subverted the recommendation that had remained on paper. The result has been the increase in revenue demand from period to period. No presidency has been so much hard hit as the Bombay presidency, and no part in the presidency so much as Gujarat. The high pitch of assessment and incidence of taxation per acre and per head of the population in the districts of Gujarat, especially Surat, of which Bardoli is a taluka, is worth noting. In his illuminating study of the Bombay revenue problem the late Rao Bahadur G. V. Joshi demonstrated beyond any manner of doubt, that in the year 1900-1 the incidence of land revenue on population in the Bombay presidency was heavier by far than in any other Indian province (as much as Rs. 2 per head of population), that the incidence on cultivated acreage was the highest in the Gujarat districts (as much as Rs. 4 per acre), and that in Surat district it was the highest in Gujarat (as much as Rs. 5-9-0 per acre).

So far as Bardoli is concerned, the increase in the revenue demand has been progressively steady as will appear from the following figures:

1864-65	Rs. 3,18,162
1866-67	„ 4,00,939
1894-95	„ 4,30,263
1897-98	„ 4,58,317
1923-24	„ 5,14,762

Proposed revision 20 per cent.

No Settlement Officer has contended, that the yield of an acre of land during the period of his survey has shown any increase over the corresponding yield during the previous period. Indeed it is seriously urged by the people, that the productive capacity of land has considerably deteriorated. If at one time the inflated prices following the American war were a sufficient ground to increase the revenue demand, at another time the general prosperity of the taluka was a sufficient reason, and at the time of the latest settlement, the general prosperity, abnormal rise in prices and rental value have been put forward as the reasons for a fresh enhancement, though the Settlement Commissioner himself admitted, that "the general conclusion from all the recorded statistics is, that the taluka in 1896 was either over-assessed or assessed right up to the full limit of half the rental value."

The third point for the reader to note is that the ryot is without a real remedy against this arbitrary system of assessment. He has no remedy at court. In an appeal preferred in the High Court in an assessment suit in 1873, the High Court decided the case against the Settlement Officer and in favour of the plaintiff. A storm of agitation raged over the decision, and the Bombay Revenue Jurisdiction Act was passed excluding the jurisdiction of civil courts in matters of assessments, and barring all chances for the peasant of seeking an independent tribunal to appeal to against an oppressive Settlement Officer's decision. Neither is the Government of India nor the Legislative Council competent to give any relief. "So far as the administration of the land revenue system is concerned," said a member of the Bombay Legislative Council, "the reforms have proved to be a curse. The doors of law courts are barred against the agriculturist by

statute: and the Government of India's powers of interference are considerably limited. On account of the division of functions and the devolution of larger powers, the Government of India will not exercise their superior authority of official control. Land revenue is a provincial subject and also a reserved subject. It is no doubt true, that so far as the reserved subjects are concerned, the Government of India still in theory retains the legal power of interference with the orders of local Governments, but this power is limited by the consideration that local Governments should have the largest measure of independence of the Government of India which is compatible with the due discharge by the latter of its own responsibilities. Hence in provincial reserved subjects, local Governments possess acknowledged authority of their own."

With a view to bringing the existing arbitrary system under control, evidence was led before the Joint Parliamentary Committee in 1919 for bringing the revision settlements under legislative control, and the Committee recommended, that "the process of revising the land revenue assessments ought to be brought under closer regulation by statute as soon as possible," especially because, "the people who are most affected have no voice in the shaping of the system, and the rules are often obscure and imperfectly understood by those who pay the revenue." In 1924 at the Bombay session of the Legislative Council the following resolution was passed by a majority of the Council:

> "This Council recommends, that a committee, consisting of official and non-official members of this Council, elected by the Council, with a non-official majority, be appointed to consider the question of bringing the process of revising the land revenue assessment under closer regulation by statute as

recommended by the Joint Committee appointed to consider the Government of India Bill, 1919, and to report on the nature and form of legislation that should be undertaken towards that end, and *that no revision be proceeded with and no new rates under any revised settlement be introduced till the said legislation is brought into effect.*"

Government of course opposed the resolution, but seeing that it was carried by a majority, they appointed a committee called the Land Revenue Assessment Committee, in accordance with the first part of the resolution, but ignored the second part we have italicised above. Three years were allowed to roll by, and revision settlement of taluka after taluka was proceeded with and enforced, in defiance of the recommendation of the Parliamentary Committee to introduce legislation as soon as possible, and in defiance of the resolution of the Council reproduced above. Then came another resolution in 1927 which was passed by a majority of 52 against 29, Government again presenting a solid opposition:

> "This Council, reaffirming the principle of the resolution as amended and carried by it by a majority on the 15th March 1924, recommends to the Governor-in-Council that *he will be pleased to give immediate effect to it* by introducing the necessary legislation, after taking into consideration the report, the minutes of dissent and suggestions of the members of the Land Revenue Assessment Committee, *and making provision for giving retrospective effect to such legislation* in view of the fact that in many cases new revision settlements were proceeded with and new rates introduced after the resolution of 15th March 1924, *and pending such legislation to issue orders to the revenue authorities*

concerned not to collect the assessment enhanced in revision after the 15th March, 1924."

A year elapsed without the necessary legislation being introduced, and without Government having paid any heed to either of the two resolutions of the Legislative Council. The resolution issued by Government on the report of the Revenue Assessment Committee provides a most painful chapter in the history of land revenue policy.

The Committee consisted of 22 members, only seven out of whom signed the report without qualification. There was a regular tug of war between the officials and the non-officials, the seven official members appending a joint minute of dissent, and six non-official members appending joint or seperate minutes. And look at the result. The Government resolution on the report made short work of almost every important recommendation of the Committee. As regards the basis of the assessment, Government, we are told, felt constrained, 'after the fullest deliberation,' to 'accept the view of the official members of the Committee,' that 'rental value must be adopted as the *sole* basis for fixing the assessment.' Take next the question of fixing the maximum percentage of the net profits as the assessment that can be claimed by Government. The Committee decided by a majority that the assessment should not exceed 25 per cent. of the net profits. But here again the Governor-in-Council 'considers, that he may appropriately adhere to the present practice of regarding 50 per cent. of the rental value as the maximum limit,' 'present practice' meaning, by the bye, the practice introduced by the Settlement Commissioner during the recent settlements! Another important recommendation of the Committee was the appointment of a standing advisory

committee to examine all revision settlement proposals. Here again 'the arguments of the officials members against this recommendation have been fully set forth in the report, and they have the approval of Government.' There was the question of the subsoil water rate, and the non-official members of the Committee were of the opinion that the practice of making the subsoil water the subject of assessment should be abolished. Government found, that 'the arguments of the official members opposing the abolition of this rate' had not been 'successfully met,' and they were 'unable to accept the recommendation.' Even the most harmless recommendation of the non-official members that the Settlement Officer 'shall have the assistance of two representatives of the cultivators elected by the Taluka Local Board in preparing his settlement' was found unacceptable. 'Government,' we are told with sickening repetition, 'agree with the arguments of the official members against the proposal and regret that they cannot see their way to accept it'!

The resolution thus sought to defeat the very objects of the recommendation of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, namely to give the people most affected some 'voice in the shaping of the system,' and to pass legislation calculated to perpetuate the existing syetem. Speaking on the resolution last cited the Revenue Member said:

> "I should like to point out, that the revenue for the first 25 talukas for which revision settlements have been carried out already amounts to Rs. 10½ lakhs, and I must express surprise, that any honourable member of this House should have seen fit to suggest that Government should accept a sacrifice of revenue of this large amount,

especially *in the present financial conditions of this presidency.*"

Contrast with this the statement of Mr. Frazer-Tyler in 1841:

> "In framing an assessment, therefore, in which the well-being of the ryots is what we have in view, the question becomes—'what is the utmost Government can let them have,' and not 'what is the utmost they can let Government have.'"

Or the statement of Sir Bartle Frere, Governor of Bombay, in 1864:

> "It had been clearly laid down by Government, that *financial considerations were to be held of minor importance*, and they would look rather to the indirect results of the fixity of tenure and moderation of assessment and to the consequent improvement in the condition of the ryots, than to the direct increase of land revenue."

India is not only bled, to use Lord Salisbury's phrase, but the lancet is applied to the most anaemic part of the body. The history of land revenue policy is a grave scandal affording sufficient ground for the conduct of a no-tax campaign against the policy. But the issue before Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel was comparatively narrower. I shall deal with it in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

WHAT HAPPENED WITH BARDOLI

"Assessments cannot be dictated by the theorist in his study they elude dogmatic treatment and can only be safely worked out by the settlement officer in the village and on the fields."

— *Government of India's Resolution of the 16th January.*

THE scandal detailed in the foregoing chapter affected not only Bardoli but numerous other talukas. The last settlement of the Bardoli taluka had taken place in 1896, and a fresh revision, according to the existing practice in the Bombay presidency, became due in 1926. The work was entrusted to Sjt. M. S. Jayakar, a member of the Provincial Civil Service, who had certainly no previous experience of similar work to his credit. He started on his labours some time in 1924, and in about five months prepared a report for submission to Government. The report bears date 30th June, 1925, but it could not be submitted to Government until as late as 11th November 1925, because, as Sjt. Jayakar says in his letter enclosing the report, "the draft reports in advance were submitted to the Settlement Commissioner, and after being revised in accordance with his instructions in connection with certain paragraphs specially regarding leases, sales, etc., they were again submitted to him for approval. He has returned them now for being

submitted through the proper channel." This he wrote as Collector of Surat. The Assistant Settlement Officer's report is usually submitted through the Collector who reviews it and forwards it to the Settlement Commissioner. In the present case the report could not be reviewed by the Collector, because to use the language of the Government Resolution, "the Settlement Officer himself happenened at the time to be the Collector during the absence on leave of the permanent Collector." It was however "exhaustively dealt with by the Commissioner of Settlements, himself a former Collector of the district, and in fact has been practically rewritten by him," evidently because in spite of its revision according to his instructions, it had failed to satisfy his requirements.

But let us summarise the report. Sjt. Jayakar recommended an increase of 25 per cent. over the existing rates, but raised 23 villages from a lower group to a higher group, with the result that the increase in the total assessment of the taluka amounted to something over 30 per cent. The old assessment which was Rs. 5,14,762 was raised to Rs. 6,72,273. His reasons for the increase may be summarised in his own words as under:

1. "Communications have considerably improved, including the opening of the broad gauge line of the Tapti Valley Railway.

2. "Population has increased by about 3,800.

3. "The increase in the number of milch cattle and carts.

4. "Increase in wealth as judged by the new and well built *pucca* houses springing up all over.

5. "Improved condition of the Kaliparaj. Spread of education and prohibition among the Kaliparaj.

6. "Abnormal rise in the prices of food grains and of cotton.

7. "Agricultural wages have doubled.

8. "The prices of land have risen, and assessment represents a 'steadily decreasing proportion of the rent.

The consideration, however, that weighed with him most in recommending an increase of 30 per cent. was, that the price of the total products of the taluka "represents a clear increase of 15,08,077" over the price of the products during the previous settlement."

This report was published early next year. No, I must correct myself. It was not published. These reports are never published even in the Government Gazette. As Sjt. Shivadasani, a former revenue officer, said in his speech in the Council in March this year, "copies of the Settlement Officer's reports are not made freely available to the public. What usually takes place is that one copy is kept at the *taluka kacheri* and the cultivators are expected to know the report and to send in their objections. I say this is not fair. We all know how very backward the villagers are, how very lazy they are, and we cannot expect them to walk 20 miles to the 'taluka town' and to go and see the report which several times is in English. . . . As a matter of fact, at one stage I was told that in some cases the Mamlatdar refused to allow the people to take copies." The Bardoli report too was made available to the public only in the sense that a copy could be had for reference at the *taluka kacheri.* The Bardoli Taluka Congress Committee appointed a Committee, with Sjt. Narahari Parikh as Chairman, and Sjt. Khushalbhai Morarji as Secretary. Sjt. Parikh wrote to the Mamlatdar expressing his willingness to pay

any price for a copy of the report, but he was asked to read and to take extracts, if he wished, at the *kacheri.* Having studied the report the Committee toured the taluka, and collected evidence contracting most of the 'facts' found by the Settlement Officer and Sjt. Parikh criticised the report in detail in a series of articles in *Navajivan.* Professor Malkani of the Gujarat Mahavidyalaya also wrote a similar series of articles in *Young India.*

Not content with this, the agriculturists of Bardoli met in conference in January 1927, and decided to send a deputation of the leading agriculturists headed by their Council representatives R. B. Bhimbhai Naik and Sjt. Shivadasani to wait on the Revenue Member Mr. (now Sir) J. L. Rieu. This they did in March 1927, but the Revenue Member treated them with scant courtesy. In May of the same year Rao Bahadur Bhimbhai Naik submitted a long representation to the Revenue Member criticising the Settlement Officer's report in exhaustive detail. That too had no effect.

In a Government resolution issued in July 1927 Government brushed aside the popular objections, agreed with the recommendation of the Settlement Commissioner, who had suggested an entirely new grouping, especially of 32 villages, which by the bye had the effect of enhancing the rates of some of these villages by 50 and 60 per cent., inasmuch as they had to bear the effect of the enhancement and of the promotion to a higher group, and generally agreed with the Settlement Officer in basing an increase on the rise in prices of crops, especially cotton, and recommended 22 per cent. increase instead of the 30 per cent. and 29 per cent. recommended by the Settlement Officer and the Settlement Commissioner respectively.

In discussing the objections submitted by the people, the Government agreed, "that the price of cotton has fallen since 1925," and that the prices "may not now be so high as they were five years ago," but contended that "*the average figure must be substantially higher than the figure of the first 14 years*," and roundly affirmed that, "*revenue settlements which are guaranteed for the long period of thirty years are not based solely on prices which fluctuate, but mainly on the statistics of leases and rental value.*" In recommending 22 per cent. they said that they had done so with a view to making an allowance for the fall in cotton prices and probability of some decline in rentals.

The last sentence in the foregoing paragraph is just by way of an excuse, and the penultimate italicised sentence reveals, in my opinion, the cloven hoof. It reveals the mentality of the Government who think through their Settlement Commissioner, whom one may appropriately call the presiding deity of all the settlement transactions in the presidency.

Those who had submitted representation to Government on behalf of the people had addressed themselves throughout to the Settlement Officer's report, as copies of the Settlement Commissioner's report reviewing the Settlement Officer's report were not available until they were well-nigh wrested from Government by an enterprising M.L.C. in March 1928. This was a most revealing document, and no wonder that the Government should have deliberately withheld it. The Settlement Officer himself admitted that his report was submitted to Government, "after being revised in accordance with the Settlement Commissioner's instructions in connection with certain paragraphs, specially leases, sales, etc." And yet this

Settlement Commissioner in his own letter reviewing this report revised according to his suggestions made short work of the most important part of the Settlement Officer's report. Here are his strictures:

"We now come to Mr. Jayakar's proposals for fresh rates. I regret to find that he has also exclusively confined his consideration to the gross value of the produce! Even in his summary of the general conditions in paragraph 57 he confines his notice of the rise in land value and rents to a single sentence, and he only says that sale prices have risen steadily, and that the assessment consequently represents a decrease in proportion to the rent. Here there is no foothold, nothing definite that one can possibly use as foundation for anything. This is not what one expects in a settlement report. He then occupies two pages in proving what we all well know, that if Government had taken its revenue in kind, then the cash value of the revenue would have increased enormously. He shows that the probable increase in the gross produce of the taluka is something like 15 lakhs, and then only it begins to dawn upon him, that perhaps it is all irrelevant, because if the cost of production had increased likewise by 15 lakhs, there would be no increase on which any further demand for a share in the rental value could be based. Furthermore, if the cost of production had increased say by 17 lakhs and not 15, then there is a case for actual reduction. Now, how is Mr. Jayakar going to determine for us whether the increased cost of production has or has not altogether exceeded the increased value of the production? He has nothing more to say than that 'this factor cannot certainly be ignored.'

In fact he leaves the main gate of the fort wide open. The whole of his conclusion could be rushed and overthrown in a moment, without there being in his report a single word of reply, by any one who alleges that the cost of production has increased more than the price of the produce. . . . I am afraid, that almost the whole of Mr. Jayakar's report from paragraph 57 to paragraph 65 is irrelevant, and worse than that, it is positively dangerous as affording no justification for his proposals and suggesting arguments against them. Towards the end of paragraph 65 he does see also the great difficulty of determining assessment for a period of 30 years ahead. It is of course, as Government are well aware, a task beyond human power. Thirty years' settlements are things which ought not to be attempted. They have only been adopted in the past through a complete ignorance of the nature of settlements, and absence of any theory or legal provision for the foundation of settlements. But of course if you fix settlements with reference to the gross price of produce, you are in the worst possible position. The state of mind to which one is reduced is well revealed in the last portion of paragraph 65. When we come to paragraph 66 where Mr. Jayakar makes his final proposals, he is of course in this condition. He has shown, gross produce has increased enormously, so that he is quite sure that the 33 per cent. can certainly be taken on that foundation. At the same time he knows that the prices may not be maintained and he does not want to be accused of excess. So he very timidly and without the slightest stated reason at all takes refuge in an increase of 25 per cent. as 'fair and

equitable.' If the Government maximum of increase had been 75 per cent. he would probably have said that 65 per cent. was 'quite fair and equitable.' The truth is that he is sailing without a compass and without rudder."

This long quotation will show clearly why Government were interested in keeping back a copy of this precious document. If the Settlement Officer had no foothold, neither had the Government in recommending 22 per cent., and like Sjt. Jayakar they too had, "very timidly and without the slightest stated reason at all, taken refuge" in an increase of 22 per cent. "as fair and equitable"!

Having thus disposed of Sjt. Jayakar's report the Settlement Commissiner Mr. Anderson proceeds to discover some foothold which he could use as a secure foundation for enhancement. And so he turned to "our one true guide, the rental value," accepted Sjt. Jayakar's appendices of sale and rentals as accurate, assumed that "at least half the total area is held by landlords who do not cultivate it," and on the basis of the rental value recommended 29 per cent.

In making their choice between the two reports,—Sjt. Jayakar's and Mr. Anderson's,—the Government were between the devil and the deep sea, and they somehow found a way of escape by recommending 22 per cent. increase.

There was something shady, moreover, about the circumstances in which the revised assessment was applied to Bardoli. Government Resolution No. 2973 of 5th May 1903 lays down, that the year of introduction of a new settlement must be the first year of the new settlement and not the last year of the current settlement, and Section 104 of the Land Revenue Code expressly provides, that in the year of introduction of a

new settlement, "the difference between the old and the new assessment of all lands on which the latter may be in excess of the former shall be remitted, and the revised assessment shall be levied only from the next following year." With the Government Resolution and Section 104 read together, the new settlement rates in Bardoli could be introduced only in the revenue year 1927–1928 and levied in the year 1928–1929, *i. e.*, in February 1929. To evade Section 104, the new settlement was introduced on the 19th of July 1927 (July being the last month of the revenue year 1926-1927) in contravention of the above cited Government Resolution, so as to enable Government to levy the new rates in 1927–1928.

We propose to state in the next chapter the people's case.

CHAPTER IV

THE PEOPLE'S CASE

"It is one of the tragedies of public life that the wrong people are so often right."

— *The Spectator*

THE case for enhancement is to be found in the three Government documents summarised in the last chapter. Forgetting for a moment the mutually conflicting character of those documents, we shall set out what the people had to say with regard to all the arguments that had been advanced in those documents and in speeches and statements made by Government officials from time to time since the launching of the Satyagraha. In view of the report of the Broomfield Committee, completely vindicating the complaint of the ryots, an examination of the Government's case can have no more than an academical interest. But I summarise the people's case, as it was presented then, to show,—as I shall do in the Second Part,—how substantially the people's contentions have been borne out by the Committee.

Let us take up Sjt. Jayakar's reasons summarised in the foregoing chapter, and state what the people had to say in respect of them:

1. Much has been made of the opening of the Tapti Valley Railway since the last settlement. Mr. Anderson also in his speech in the Legislative

Council this year waxed eloquent on the plea of the railway benefits. Sjt. Jayakar and Mr. Anderson conveniently forgot, that Mr. Fernandez, who prepared the settlement report for the year 1896, was fully sensible of the fact that the railway was shortly to be opened, and he had, like the faithful Government servant that he was, taken into full consideration the prospective benefits of the railway when recommending his revised rates. He said: "I learn from the Agent to the B. B. C. I. Railway Company, that the construction of this line may be begun about this time next year. At any rate it may be safely assumed that five years hence Bardoli will be in railway communication with Surat; and as the revision settlement, when introduced, will be guaranteed for 30 years, we shall be justified in giving the projected railway its due weight, according to the present circumstances, when considering the revision maximum rates." Mr. Fernandez in determining the rates had fully considered the benefits he expected to accrue to the peasants. His successors think, that the peasants should be taxed again for the benefits assumed to have accrued to them.

2. As regard the roads newly made since the last settlement, it will be enough to remember that they are made out of local funds, that most of them are no better than they were in Col. Prescott's time,—"enough to break the heart of man and beast," that in Col. Prescott's words during the fair season the cleared tracks are better adapted to the modest needs of the people and feet of the cattle than the wretchedly made roads called 'second class roads,' and that in his words again, "considering the very high revenue

that it (Bardoli) has paid ever since it has been in our possession, it has very great claims to consideration"—consideration which was now being shown by imposing on the agriculturists enhanced revenue!

3. The argument of increase in the population which is said to be approximately 3,800 in 30 years hardly deserves any notice. But even here it may be observed that the figure of the increase is misleading. The increase represents the increase in four or five villages which are trade or semi-urban areas, and the population in the rural areas shows a great decline.

4. The increase in the number of milch cattle shows, that the people have had to resort to dairying and similar occupations to eke out their livelihood. The more notable fact is, that as Sjt. Jayakar has himself admitted, there has been an actual *fall* in the number of plough cattle in spite of the area under cultivation having increased. The increase in the number of carts may be explained in the words of Mr. Lely, the Collector of Surat, in 1896: "Every separate cultivator needs a cart almost as much as he needs a plough. A new cart may mean that a small cultivator finds himself rich enough to buy one, but it oftener means merely a separated occupancy. In such cases it is not an addition to the capital of the taluka, but a dispersion of capital from a father's estate to a divided son or sons."

5. The argument of increase of wealth "as judged by the new and well built *pucca* houses" betrays the careless way in which Sjt. Jayakar conducted his inquiry, without having held

consultation with villagers and inquired into their economic condition. Mr. Lely in 1896 with more sympathy and better experience of people said: "An improvement in houses and a higher scale of living are grievously outweighed by the load of debt which the people have piled on themselves. The Mamlatdar estimates the total agricultural debt of the taluka at Rs. 33,76,000 representing at 12 per cent. an annual drain of Rs. 4,05,120, and he is not, I think, over the mark. It is a rare exception to find a cultivator free, and probably at least one half of the land is encumbered." The indebtedness has considerabley increased, the present figure as determined by R. B. Bhimbhai Naik being in the vicinity of a crore of rupees. Mr. Lely also noted the rise in the standard and the cost of living which Sjt. Jayakar has ignored: "The present men, as they live less laborious lives, so they have more expensive tastes than their forbears, and to gratify them will resort to the *savkar* if there is no money in the house. Formerly the ordinary cultivators to a man wore country cloth; now they must have it of finer texture from Manchester. Cheap local rice, *dal*, and *gud* were enough for the daily food; now vegetables, imported rice and refined sugar are in demand. A more luxurious generation seeks after *pansupari*, cheroots, hired servants, sweetmeats and American watches, and will borrow money to get them."

6. The improved condition of the Raniparaj as evidenced in their awakening to their duty of reform themselves, giving up drink and taking kindly to the Khadi propaganda, is indeed a fact. But they are far away yet from even a bare living wage and all steeped in debt, and a humane

Government really interested in their welfare would exempt them entirely from payment of revenue rather than penalise their reforming tendencies.

7. The rise in the prices of foodgrains and cotton is not denied. But even Government admit that the prices have again fallen. The evidence of experts in the fluctuations of prices is conclusive, that prices which shoot up to the highest peaks in abnormal years have a steady tendency to go down to the bottom. The figures of prices which have weighed with the Settlement Officer are all for abnormal years from 1914–1923, which even according to the express declaration of the Revenue Member should be excluded from consideration. "Rents for any abnormal period," he said in a speech in the Legislative Council, "are always excluded." The theory of an abnormal rise in the price of the produce of the taluka has been so throughly canvassed by the Settlement Commissioner himself that one need not expatiate on it. The people's contention is, that the cost of production has abnormally increased, and in several cases even landholders with considerable holdings have absolutely no margin of profit, much less the occupant with an uneconomic holding. The Congress Inquiry Committee that toured the taluka collected a number of cases from representative villages to show that the increased cost of production left no margin to the cultivator, and that agriculture was a losing occupation. Moreover, a general rise in the prices affects the peasant as much as the non-agriculturist. An agriculturist does not grow all the crops that he needs, and the petty

agriculturists do not sell their crops, but draw a scanty subsistence out of them.

8. The statement about the rise in the sale value of lands and in the rental value is based on statistics, again of abnormal years, and prepared without the scrutiny required by the Settlement Manual.

The people's representatives from time to time drew the attention of Government to the incorrect and unreliable data which had been made the basis of the revised settlement by the Settlement Officer and the Settlement Commissioner. As soon as the latter's report was available, the present writer demonstrated, in an article in *Young India*, on the strength of certain statements in the report, how Sjt. Jayakar's statistics could not have been compiled after the necessary scrutiny. I summarise the argument below:

Under the Settlement Manual the Settlement Officer has "to make careful local enquiries village by village, and group by group." What happened however was this. His report bore date 30th June 1925. Assuming that the actual drafting took him at least a fortnight, he seemed to have finished the scrutiny—not on the spot, but in the taluka *kacheri*—in about 10 days, as would appear from a circular issued by the Mamlatdar of the taluka to the Patels and Talatis to report themselves at the taluka "on sight of" his order dated 1st of June 1925, "as Mr. Jayakar will camp here from the 4th June and will himself inspect some of the details prepared by you." This report was submitted, informally, for revision to Mr. Anderson, the Settlement Commissioner, who, we are told by the Government Resolution, "practically rewrote the report." In its final form it was actually submitted on the 11th

November. On the 23rd October, however, the Mamlatdar orders the Talatis to report themselves at the taluka on the 27th October (*i.e., five months after* the date of report which is 30th June), "as I have to check the sale statistics prepared by you." This circular was certainly due to Mr. Anderson's suggestion to Sjt. Jayakar for a closer scrutiny. Sjt. Jayakar was Collector at that moment, and could not further scrutinise the statistics himself and delegated the task to the Mamlatdar who issued the order just mentioned. Mr. Anderson was far from being satisfied, as his remarks showed:

"Moreover, I find in some of the correspondence statements that many of these figures had been stated and rechecked by the Mamlatdar. Now I do not consider that check by the Mamlatdar, which usually means check by one of his clerks or circle inspectors, can take the place of the check which a Settlement Officer is supposed to apply personally to these sale and rental statistics."

The perfunctory way in which the whole scrutiny was applied, if indeed it was applied, has thus been nowhere better exposed than by Mr. Anderson himself.

I also supported my contention by strong circumstantial evidence. Whenever the Settlement Officer begins his operations in the taluka, he has to issue a notification to the people, that "as the officer is conducting an inquiry for revising the assessment in the taluka, any one who may have anything to say as regards the economic condition of any survey number should see the Settlement Officer and bring it to his notice orally or in writing." Sjt. Jayakar issued no such notification, and afforded no opportunities to people to say whatever they had to say regarding

their economic condition. Moreover it was pointed out, that the orders of the Mamlatdar issued in December 1924 and January 1925 to the Talatis lacked any instructions as to the exclusion of certain transactions of an uneconomic character.

The people also contended, that even if the statistics were genuine, the prices paid indicated not so much the value of the land as the extent of the purchaser's desire to possess land. Men returning from South Africa could think of no better investment than land, not because they were clever businessmen, but because they accepted the traditional belief that possession of land would improve their status. What Stephen Gwynn says of the agriculturists in Ireland was literally true of the Bardoli agriculturists: "To be a farmer in Ireland is not at all the same thing as being an artisan, still less as being a labourer; though the farmer's earnings may be no greater than the labourer's, he is regarded as belonging to a different class. Further, if you go into shop-keeping you go in to make money, and if you succeed you will be applauded. If you are a farmer, in most cases, your farm limits by its extent the possibility of your earnings. Intensive cultivation is practically unknown, and to rise in the scale of farmers you must, from an Irish point of view, increase your holding. *But what you buy or acquire is far less a means of earning wealth than a possession* which gives rank. Land has everywhere in Ireland a sentimental value! And the smaller and worse the farm the less relation has the price to the commercial value of what is bought."

It was pointed out, times without number, that the argument about the rise in the price of produce to the extent of Rs. 15 lakhs was perhaps the absurdest of all.

The price of the whole agricultural produce in the year of the new settlement was, according to Sjt. Jayakar, Rs. 28 lakhs and odd. That is obviously gross produce, and Sjt. Jayakar argued that it exceeded by Rs. 15 lakhs the price of the produce in 1896. If the price of the produce in 1896 was 13 lakhs — and it must be gross — even under the present rackrenting policy of Government the amount of the old assessment cannot be substained, because Government's share of the *gross* produce has never been claimed to be more than 20 per cent. Sjt. Jayakar's argument about the rise in the price of produce was thus even more absurd than Mr. Anderson had shown it to be.

To sum up, the substance of the people's charge against Sjt. Jayakar was that he had prepared his report relying on the statistics submitted by the Talatis, had made no inquiries on the spot, applied no scutiny, and cared little to carry out anything like an inquiry into the economic condition of the people, and that the grounds he had relied on in recommending an enhancement of 30 per cent. were either flimsy or had no foundation in fact.

Then remained the argument relied upon by the Settlement Commissioner. We have seen in the last chapter how he had made short work of Sjt. Jayakar's report, and we have seen in this chapter that he himself had questioned the value of the scrutiny applied to the sale statistics. What was surprising was, that in spite of this he fell back on the very same rental statistics and depended upon them as his "one true guide." He knew that it was no use depending on the rise in the price of gross produce, he knew that he could not recommend an increase on the basis of that rise, as Sjt. Jayakar had done, — he abhorred the expression "profits of agriculture" and

also Section 107 of the Land Revenue Code which lays down that regard must be had to the "profits of agriculture" in fixing assessment of land and yet he was sure that an increase ought to be recommended. He therefore had nothing for it but to rely on questionable statistics.

He forgot, in his hurry to make the best of the rental statistics, that it is definitely laid down in the instructions to Settlement Officers that statistics of rent, whether in cash or in kind, cannot be used as the basis for definite conclusions as regards the incidence of assessments, unless they "exist in considerable volume" and are sifted. Mr. Anderson assumed that the statistics existed "in considerable volume" relying on Sjt. Jayakar's total of 42,923 acres as the area leased out *during seven years* between 1918 and 1925, and thought, "there is little doubt that at least half the total area is held by landholders who do not cultivate it." And this in spite of Sjt. Jayakar's categorical statement that 23,995 acres out of a cultivated area of 97,500 acres is in the hands of non-agriculturists, and that "more than two-thirds of the land is in the hands of those who cultivate it." After months of silence over the criticism made by publicists of this palpable error, the Director of Information was directed by Government to trot out this ludicrous plea on Mr. Anderson's behalf: "Sjt. Jayakar found one acre tenanted at a rent of Rs. 10 for one year or for two years, or sometimes for seven years. He called these respectively leases for one acre for Rs. 10, two acres for Rs. 20 or seven acres for Rs. 70. This of course *sometimes* makes one acre into seven acres. But all the leases were by no means for seven years. Many were for one year only." How does the one year's duration affect the case? The

average annual leased area would in any case be 42,923 acres divided by seven. If we are to believe Mr. Anderson that 42,923 acres represent the total leased area, the curious result follows that in some cases the area leased would exceed the actual occupied area of the land in the village, as the following table will show:

Village	Total area of land in the village in acres	Leased Area dry land Acres	Gunthas	rice land Acres	Gunthas
Utara	1,317	2,862	4	0	0
Vadhava	794	1,186	21	36	11
Miyawadi	1,057	1,185	0	18	0
Bhensadla	751	925	3	37	33

One could not think of a worse *reductio ad absurdum*.

But the Director of Information stated that Mr. Anderson "stands by that statement and maintains that it was and still is even short of the truth." In defence of the statement we were asked to believe the absurd figure of 42,923 acres, and to add to it "the scrutinised and rejected and unscrutinised" statistics (whatever that they mean!), when the whole popular contention was that even that *seven* years' figure was made up of numerous rejectable statistics.

The fact is, that save for a few moneylenders or absentee landlords, Bardoli is a taluka which has a compact population of thrifty, industrious and resourceful agriculturists whose very virtues had become their vices in the eyes of the Government. As Mr. Smart, whose judgement was since the inauguration of Satyagraha warped by the passions and prejudices of the moment, said as Collector of Ahmednagar before the Land Revenue Assessment Committee in 1924: "*In a ryotwari province only a small percentage of land is rented, and out of that*

small percentage at least half is not rented for an economic rent."

But the Commissioner of Settlements unmindful of the instructions in the Settlement Manual, unmindful of facts, and unmindful of the unequivocal opinion of men like Messrs. Smart, Smyth, Garret, Maxwell, and Mardhekar, all grown grey in Government service, stuck to his "one true guide, rental values." And why should he not? He knew that in doing so he could rely on the support of Government who, in their resolution on the Assessment Committee's report, had brushed aside the considered opinion of the experienced officials just now cited, and were content to endorse his pet obsession.

But even the Government knew that in accepting the rental basis, they were throwing overboard not only their own instructions to the Settlement Officers, but even their Land Revenue Code of which Section 107 definitely lays down, that in fixing the assessment of land regard must be had to the profits of agriculture. Having therefore observed in July 1927 in the Government Resolution on the Bardoli and Chorasi settlements, that "revenue settlements which are guaranteed for the long period of thirty years are not based solely on prices which fluctuate but mainly on the statistics of leases and values," they wrote in May 1928 in reply to some Council members who were corresponding with them on the question of the Bardoli Satyagraha: "His Excellency is further satisfied, that since the date of the previous settlement which was made 30 years ago, the profits of agriculture in Bardoli taluka have increased by much more than 20 per cent., and consequently it is equitable that the assessment, being the share of the profits, the increase of which is mainly due to Government action, should be 20 per cent.

over all," — a perfectly preposterous claim looking to the fact, that Sjt. Jayakar had made no attempt at all to determine the net profits, which presupposes a calculation of the cost of production.

But absolutely no heed was paid to the popular contention, however strongly it was supported by argument and statistics. The whole case on behalf of Government was so utterly wrong, as the people thought, and as has now been proved by the Broomfield Committee, that it was open to the people to demand a cancellation of the second revision settlement and a restoration of the *status quo*, if not a reduction, for which indeed they had a strong case. Indeed when the Satygraha campaign was in full swing, Sjt. C. Y. Chintamani, the well-known Liberal leader, was surprised why the Satyagrahis had not asked for a cancellation. But the Satyagrahis had chosen as their leader one who was known as much for his moderation as for his firmness. He gave them the right lead, and advised them to concentrate on the demand for a full and impartial inquiry into the whole case.

That however forms the subject matter of the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

TWELFTH OF FEBRUARY

" Oh, come, thou God of liberty
And fill our souls this day — "

— *A French song of the 14th of July*

WHAT were the people to do? As we have seen in a previous chapter, they had been agitating against Sjt. Jayakar's report since the middle of 1926. The inquiry committee appointed by their Taluka Congress Committee had exhaustively criticised the report, and published facts and figures to prove that the agriculturist had no profits out of land which could sustain even the existing rate of assessment. They then waited on the Revenue Member early in 1927 with their Council representatives at their head. Later these gentlemen submitted long representations exhaustively dealing with the report and revealing the real economic condition of the people. After the Government Resolution finally fixing the revised settlement, they met in September 1927 in a conference at Bardoli attended by thousands of agriculturists and presided over by Sjt. Dadubhai Desai, M.L.C. After full deliberation they unanimously passed a resolution to withhold payment of the enhanced amount. That too had no effect, the Talatis were ordered to collect the revised assessment from the 5th February 1928, and the agriculturists were driven to do what they could.

Their representatives now thought of a different leader. The leaders they had chosen up to now could not promise them much, in fact the leaders frankly told them that they had failed, and that the people might think of some weapon other than the orthodox one of deputations and representations. Sjts. Kalyanji and Kunvarji, the two brothers who were responsible, among others, for inviting Gandhiji to select Bardoli as his first field of operations in 1921, and who had been working in the taluka all these years, went in company with the Taluka Secretary Khushalbhai to Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel with a request, that he should go to Bardoli and lead the peasants in a campaign of Satyagraha. He declined, saying that he was loath to interfere where men like Rao Bahadur Bhimbhai and Rao Saheb Dadubhai were guiding them. They went back only to return with their request reinforced by the advice of the friends who had been guiding them. This time Sjt. Vallabhbhai did not give them the cold shoulder, but asked them to go back to Bardoli, consult the leading agriculturists, warn them against the dire consequences of a Satyagraha campaign which might be indefinitely prolonged, and then come back to tell him what the agriculturists thought. They went, and in obedience to his instructions, visited a number of villages, sounded numerous agriculturists and returned to Ahmedabad. This time they brought with them those seasoned soldiers — Darbarsaheb Gopaldas and Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishanker Vyas, who, they said, were ready to go to Bardoli, in case Satyagraha was declared. They intimated to Sjt. Vallabhbhai that their inquiries showed that there was a unanimity and keenness about offering Satyagraha, but a small number thought that payment not of the whole revised assessment, but

only the enhanced amount, should be withheld. Sjt. Vallabhbhai said, "That's all right. You go and see Bapu; I am following you." A campaign like that could certainly not be launched without 'Bapu's' consent. So they went to Gandhiji. He had not taken them seriously up to this moment, and simply referred them every time to Sjt. Vallabhbhai. This time however he gave them a long talk as he was going walking to the Vidyapith to give his weekly lecture there. Kalyanji opened the talk, told him that they had practically covered the whole of the taluka which was unanimous so far as the fight was concerned, but that they would prefer to refuse payment of the increment over the old assessment.

Gandhiji—I don't quite understand that.

Kalyanji—22 per cent. enhancement has been imposed. The people say they would like to pay the old assessment and refuse the 22 per cent. increment.

Gandhiji—That is most dangerous. Government will fight you with the help of your own money and recover the increment in a moment. No assessment can be paid until the increment is cancelled, and you must plainly say to Government: "Declare the enhancement cancelled and then take the old assessment which we are prepared to pay." Are the people prepared to take up this attitude?

Kalyanji—I am not quite sure about the bigger places like Bardoli or Valod, for the Vanias in these places are naturally afraid that Government might deprive them of their lands and transfer them to their original occupants, the Raniparaj people. But the other villages are quite solid.

Gandhiji—That's all right. But is their cause just and their case unassailable?

Kalyanji—Certainly. Naraharibhai has demonstrated it in his articles.

Gandhiji—I do not know. I have not read the articles with care. But remember that you will have to keep the whole country with you, and the first condition is that your cause must be perfectly just. Then there is another point. The people may be ready to fight. But do they know the implications of Satyagraha? Supposing Vallabhbhai is removed with the rest of you, will they stand together?

Kalyanji—That is more than I can say.

Gandhiji—Well, you will have to ascertain that. But what does Vallabhbhai say?

Sjt. Vallabhbhai had just arrived. He said he had studied the case and had no doubt that the cause was just. "Well, then, there is nothing more to be considered," said Gandhiji. "Victory to Gujarat!"

But it had been far from easy for Sjt. Vallabhbhai to make up his mind. He had indeed in the past led the Nagpur Satyagraha and the Borsad Satyagraha, but he had nothing like an itch to start movements of that kind, whenever there was an occasion. In 1923 quite a number of his co-workers were anxious to start a movement for Civil Disobedience in Gujarat. He did not hesitate to throw cold water over their enthusiasm. Several Congress workers pressed him very strongly to lead the Civil Disobedience started in Nagpur in 1927, but he declined, as the materials in his opinion were not such as to encourage him to undertake the task. And then he had other considerations. He had been working for the last four or five years in Ahmedabad as President of the Municipality, and his work had extorted high praise from Government officials, some of whom had developed towards him a feeling of friendship and even personal regard. On the top of it all,

he had worked cheek by jowl with them for the relief of the flood-stricken in Gujarat only a few months ago, and impressed them strongly with the efficiency of his organisation, so much so that the Collecter of Ahmedabad had asked him if he could recommend him and his co-workers to Government for a recognition of their services. Thus circumstanced, what was he to do? With the instinct of a soldier capable of taking quick decisions, and with his heart running out to the oppressed agriculturist, he decided to go to Bardoli. But even then he would not take the final plunge until he had correctly sounded the agriculturists and until he was convinced that they were prepared to go the full length with him without counting the cost. So he accepted the presidentship of the conference of agriculturists of Bardoli held on the 4th of February, just a day before the first instalment of revenue became due. There was no time to lose and yet a decision of a momentous character could not be hurried through. He called a workers' meeting first and conferred with them as to what was to be done. They were anxious not to precipitate matters, and wanted the President to examine and cross-examine the people before he recommended any course of action. So an informal conference of the representatives of villages was called. 79 villages had sent their representatives. Amongst these were men from every community, Kanbis, Anavlas, Kaliparaj and Parsis. They were men with something to lose and they knew what Satyagraha would mean for them. There were people paying from Rs. 300 to Rs. 500 as land revenue, and there was a Parsi who alone paid Rs. 700 a year. They did not mince matters. Men of five or six villages said they thought it their duty to resist the enhancement, but felt that they must do so by tendering the old rate and

challenging the Government to take such action as they desired to recover the balance. The rest were determined that payment of the whole of the revised assessment should be refused, pending the decision of the Government to come to terms. There were two villages of which the representatives described the condition in perfect frankness.

"Are you speaking for the whole of your village?" they were asked.

"I am," said one of them with stubborn determination.

"But if all the rest fall back, what will you do?"

"I will stand alone."

Then came another who was asked the same question. He said: "My village will stand together, so long as the taluka stands together, not afterwards."

A third man said: "We are all determined, Hindus and Musalmans, but I must say that 25 per cent. of the Musalmans are rather shaky."

Then came another who said, "Sir, if four true people could be found to stand firm, come what might, I am sure of success."

"What do you mean by four?"

"By four I mean four of the top men."

"Do you consider yourself one of them?"

"No, sir, I am the fifth. I will follow the four."

"Are there four people who are prepared to stake their all in resisting the enhancement?" asked the President.

Immediately four stood up to express their determination. In the meanwhile the representatives of the five villages who thought it advisable to pay up the old assessment were confabulating with the rest and announced their decision to go with the taluka. It was after this that Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel

addressed the Conference. He spoke on the Government Resolution and the general revenue policy of Government, and said that as to the justice of their case he had not the slightest doubt, he was sure that the revision settlement was wrong, but he was not sure of their strength. In 1921 they were on the point of being weighed, but unforeseen circumstances had intervened, and they had had no opportunity of giving a demonstration of their strength. The hour had struck this time, but were they really ready? He asked them to search their hearts and ask themselves if they could carry on a non-violent and truthful struggle for any length of time against a Government which might mobilise all the forces at its disposal, for the question ultimately affected not one taluka, but many talukas and many districts, that is to say, the whole of India. He warned them against coming to a hasty decision, and gave them seven days to think it over, so that he might in the meanwhile communicate with Government and see if he could persuade them to reconsider the matter and announce an impartial inquiry.

There were three M.L.C.s, Sjts. Bhimbhai Naik and Dadubhai Desai and Dr. Dikshit, present at the Conference, who emphasised the point that they had exhausted every constitutional means at their disposal, and as they had failed, they had gladly entrusted their case to one who could take them along the path of non-violent resistance and suffering.

After this Sjt. Vallabhbhai went back to Ahmedabad and addressed on the 6th February a letter to His Excellency the Governor inviting his attention to the situation, and to the flagrant injustice of the revision settlement, and suggesting to him "to afford a fair opportunity to the people to place their case

before an impartial tribunal clothed with adequate authority." He also added that unless this was done, "with all his anxiety to avoid a serious conflict with the Government, he would have no alternative but to advise the people to refuse to pay the assessment and peacefully and quietly suffer the consequences of the refusal." "Should your Excellency," he added at the end of his letter, "think it necessary that we should meet in the matter, I would gladly wait on you."

With the instinct of a trained lawyer he also pointed out in this letter a palpable irregularity. The Government had approved of the recommendations of the Settlement Commissioner who not only adopted an entirely new principle of revision but even abandoned the old grouping of villages and suggested a new grouping. "This," said Sjt. Vallabhbhai, "has resulted in placing a number of villages in a higher group which combined with other factors has been responsible, for an increase of about 50 to 60 per cent. in respect of these villages. Of this no notice was given to the people before the final orders were passed. The Government accepted the regrouping adopted by the Settlement Commissioner and passed final orders on the 19th of July. The final revision must be announced before the 1st of August if it is to come into operation during the current year. What is a more serious irregularity is that 31 villages were served with a notice in the last week of July to submit their objections, within two months, to what in reality was a final order increasing the assessment, *viz*, G. R. No. 7259/24 of the 19th July 1927. The notice makes the final order wear a tentative character and makes it incumbent on Government to dispose of the objections before making the orders final, which for want of a six months' notice could not come into operation until the next revenue year."

I take this long quotation from the letter deliberately to show that Government saw the force of the argument, but would not admit it. However, as the irregularity was glaring they partially repaired it in about a month by announcing at the next Council Session in March that the groups of about 22 villages had been lowered. The refusal on the part of His Excellency to send anything more than a curt reply through his Private Secretary that the letter "had been sent to the Revenue Department for official consideration and disposal," and the anxiety on the part of Government not to let it be known that they had done anything at the suggestion of Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel, indicate a determination from the very first not to deal directly with Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel. His Excellency had occasion during the flood relief operations to meet Sjt. Vallabhbhai and to know him and something of his work. He would have lost nothing by acceding to his request to wait on him, and possibly averted a catastrophe. But it was not to be.

The final date, *viz.*, 15th February, for the payment of the first instalment was in the meanwhile fast approaching. Sjt. Vallabhbhai waited for a further communication from Government beyond that curt acknowledgment, but as he received no reply until the 11th February he met the villagers again at Bardoli on the 12th of February as previously arranged.

The people, who had not let the grass grow under their feet, had, in the meanwhile, further discussed the question of non-payment amongst themselves and actually commenced taking signatures to a tentative pledge for non-payment of assessment. The deliberative meeting this time was very largely attended, more villages having sent their representatives and quite a number of them

having sent the pledges duly signed. There was quiet deliberation and dogged determination in their voices, as each stood up to render an account of what his village had done. Their word would have been nothing worth, if they had all mechanically stood up and repeated parrot-like the cry of non-payment. Each told his tale in his own way. "58 men have given their signatures in our village, 12 have not yet. But that does not matter," said one. "All excepting the village headman have signed the pledge," said another, "but the headman is not hostile to us." "Our Patel has already paid up and a Vania from a neighbouring village also, but we never counted on them," said a third one. "There is a section among us which is recalcitrant, but we believe as though they were not of us. Our section will never pay, come what may, and trust the rest to the will of God," said a fourth one. Quite a large majority said: "All have given their signatures. There is no fear of any one flinching." Three or four said with pardonable pride: "Hold me responsible for the whole of the village. My village will stand through thick and thin." Then said Sjt. Vallabhbhai to them:

> "I still ask you to think twice before you take the plunge. Do not derive comfort from the feeling that you have as your leader a fighter like myself. Forget me and forget my companions, fight if you feel that you must resist oppression and injustice. Do not take the plunge lightly. If you miserably fail, you will fail not to rise again for several years, but if you succeed you will have done much to lay the foundations of Swaraj. Now I am going to ask *you* to take charge of the resolution, *you* will move it and *you* will second and support it. None of

us will speak on it. It will be the expression of your own free will and choice."

One thing may be noted here. The people of Chorasi taluka, who had suffered the same injustice as Bardoli at the hands of the same Settlement Officer, had also been agitating in the orthodox way, and some of them came to Bardoli to request Sjt. Vallabhbhai to join Chorasi with Bardoli. "I know very well that you have suffered the same injustice," said Sjt. Vallabhbhai to them, "but I am afraid it is beyond my power today to organise two talukas. There is no doubt that if Bardoli succeeds, you will also be treated in the same way; you had better watch and wait. The conditions in your taluka also present peculiar difficulties. A very large percentage of the occupants in your taluka are non-cultivating residents of Surat and Rander. You cannot expect them to join you. They would be the first to pay up and place you in a sorry predicament. No, I should dissuade you strongly from thinking of Satyagraha. Rest assured that if Bardoli succeeds in getting justice, Chorasi will not be denied it."

After this they met in open conference. Sjt. Vallabhbhai made a brief speech:

"As I told you last time I addressed to H. E. the Governor a letter asking for an impartial tribunal. I have had a reply which is no reply. My letter, I am told, has been sent to the Revenue Department for consideration and disposal. When they will have finished considering the letter we do not know, neither can we wait for their decision. If the Government had said that pending consideration of my letter they had resolved to suspend the collection operations, and

asked us also to adjourn our Conference, I should gladly have complied. But now I have simply to await your decision. Since I met you last time I have looked up the law to see if in spite of being iniquitous the orders of enhancement satisfied the letter of the law. I have failed to see that they are even within the law. They are in contravention of Section 107 of the L. R. Code. The Settlement Officer had based his report on the existing system, and though I have no end of things to say about his report,—the principal being that he never troubled himself to visit the villages and hold conference with the villagers, as is at present being done in Olpad taluka,—I must say that he had adhered to the old system. The Settlement Commissioner adopted a different principle and regrouped the villages on that principle. In the event of such an alteration, Government are bound to issue a fresh notification, but in their hurry to put the revision settlement in force they did no such thing. In the cicumstances I would in all humility advise you to refuse payment of the whole assessment so long as the Government do not come to terms. You must bear clearly in mind that except your capacity for suffering and grim determination you have nothing to fight Government's brute strength with. The mightiest tyrant must bend if people are determined to put up with suffering. The question today is not of a few lakhs of rupees, but it is a question of self-respect. It is a fundamental principle of Government that there can be no taxation without representation. They should do nothing without having had your views in the matter. You have to resist the arbitrary system of

fixing the revenue according to Government's own whims and fancies.

"For this you will have to be self-possessed, resourceful, and patient. Government will try your strength in various ways, offer various inducements, use insidious means to bring about a division in your ranks. But you will have to adhere to your principle of refusal to pay at all costs and hardships.

"I have suggested a clause in the resolution to the effect, that the fight will go on, until Government appoint an impartial tribunal, or revoke the orders of enhancement. Not that we have any doubt that the enhancement is arbitrary, unjust and oppressive, but if we can make Government accept this vital principle of an independent tribunal, it is more than any material gain, temporary or permanent.

"I have nothing more to say. Do what you do with eyes open, with God as witness and fully counting the cost. It is possible that Government might pick up the leading men amongst you first to set an example, Government might first confiscate the lands of those who move the resolution today. If you are sure that these things will leave you unshaken, take up and fight the good fight."

The following resolution was then moved and seconded and supported by men from different villages and drawn from various communities in the taluka—Kanbis, Anavlas, Vanias, Parsis, and Musalmans:

"This Conference of the people of Bardoli taluka resolves that the revision settlement in Bardoli is arbitrary, unjust and oppressive, and advises all the occupants to refuse payment of the revised assessment until the Government is prepared

to accept the amount of the old assessment in full satisfaction of their dues, or until the Government appoints an impartial tribunal to settle the whole question of revision by investigation and inquiry on the spot."

The first speaker made a very brief speech. Two of those who followed made brief observations and the rest simply supported the resolution.

There were no more speeches, but after recitation of sacred texts from the Koran and of a Hindu hymn and repetition of *Ramanama*,—the whole Conference participating,—the resolution was passed in solemn silence.

That is the story of 12th of February.

CHAPTER VI

PLANNING THE CAMPAIGN

"Having now gone into the water, you must learn to swim."

— *Vallabhbhai Patel*

THE task before Sjt. Vallabhbhai was stupendous. It will be remembered that the M. L. C. friends who had guided Bardoli agriculturists had confined themselves to advising them to pay up the old assessment and to withhold the difference between the new and the old. Before the 12th of February a few of those who fought shy of the suffering and sacrifices that Satyagraha would demand had paid up the assessment, and there were some who, in spite of the Resolution of the 12th, were cherishing the old mentality of tendering the old assessment. Besides, there were some who were still sitting on the fence. These had now to be educated and enlisted as recruits.

Amongst the different communities there was nothing like cohesion. The Patidar community had a closely knit organisation, but others had not, and they might any day wreck the Patidars' organisations. The Raniparaj, the meekest of the meek, were likely to bend under the first blow. The Vanias, some of whom had heavy stakes, holding as they did hundreds of acres of land, might not hold out until the last. Some of them had intimate social relations with Government officials, and there was evident fear of their being shamed into submission. And if they fell, the poor Raniparaj, who were their debtors, would automatically succumb. The Anavlas, proud and defiant, were still sitting on the fence

and their calculating nature made them hesitate to join the fray until the campaign was in full swing. The Musalmans had expressed their readiness on the 12th, but the atmosphere in the district town of Surat was hardly encouraging and might easily contaminate Bardoli. And the mild Parsis — who could be sure about them? The intense temperance propaganda of 1921-22 had cooled many of them, and it would not be surprising if they turned up their nose at any proposal to join the rest of the taluka.

Soon after the Conference, Sjt. Vallabhbhai received from Sjt. Mohanlal Pandya, who had been reconnoitring the taluka, the following vivid letter giving his impressions:

> "The atmosphere about me fills me with doubt and dismay. Can these be the men and women who intend to engage in a fierce struggle against Government in a few days? No one seems to me to be in fighting trim. They are going about their business as though nothing had happened. The marriage season is in full swing, and there is not a village where there is no wedding or two to be celebrated, and gaily dressed people are running about in their carts from village to village. Some of them are anxious that Satyagraha or no Satyagraha the Mamlatdar should grace the occasion of their children's wedding by his presence. Add to these the wedding feasts and you have a complete picture of Bardoli. They seem to think that they can afford to miss everything but not the weddings of their infant sons and daughters. Are these the people you want to go to war against a mighty Government? I do not despair, but let us not overrate our strength. May God keep your honour!"

It was a letter worth pondering over, but there was no alternative. One thing was certain. As regards the injustice of the enhancement there was not a single dissentient voice, and even the most timid had ample faith in their leader who had fought two successful campaigns.

But the leader was no man to build much on the people's faith in him. He wanted them to have faith in themselves. "If you can give me even a hundred true men who will fight unto death, I assure you that success is certain," he had said to the representatives who met him at Bardoli. But he wanted all the 17,000 landholders to fight the good fight and not to reap the unmerited benefit of the suffering of a hundred. He therefore made elaborate plans of the campaign. There were already four centres in the taluka—at Bardoli in the centre with Sjt. Kalyanaji, Jugatram, and Khushalbhai; at Sarbhon in the south west with Dr. Tribhuvandas; at Madhi in the north with Sjt. Makanji Desai, and at Vedchhi in the east with Sjt. Chunilal Mehta and his wife. Sjt. Vallabhbhai had a meeting of all these workers, and issued instructions to open additional camps at Valod, the Mahal head-quarters and a stronghold of the Vanias, at Buhari, in the extreme south east, another stronghold of Vanias, at Vankaner, the biggest Patidar stronghold in the heart of the taluka, at Varad another Patidar stronghold in the north, at Bamni another Patidar centre in the extrme north, and Balda a Raniparaj centre in the north west, and one also at Kamalchhod near Valod. No appeal had yet been made for workers and Sjt. Vallabhbhai did not want to make any. Those who wanted to serve were already there. Dr. Chandulal always bubbling over with enthusiasm and ready to take up the humblest job was

there. He took charge of the camp at Valod and Buhari with its extensive Raniparaj area which was soon organised into several sub-centres. Sjt. Mohanlal Pandya whose letter I have just reproduced was not the man to keep at home whilst Satyagraha was proclaimed by his chief. He selected for himself Varad and its neighbourhood. Sjt. Ravishankarbhai was the man Sjt. Vallabhbhai could hardly do without in a campaign of self-purification and suffering. He was posted at Sarbhon. Darbarsaheb Gopaldas had as much share as Sjts. Mohanlal Pandya and Kalyanji in persuading Sjt. Vallabhbhai to go to Bardoli. He was posted at Bamni. Sjt. Chinai who had served his two years in the Sabarmati Jail and distinguished himself by calmly receiving numerous blows during the Surat riots took up duty at the taluka town of Bardoli. Sjt. Keshavbhai, wedded to Khadi work, got special permission from his chief Lakshmidas Purushottam to offer his services in the campaign. He joined Dr. Chandulal and made himself responsible for the Raniparaj area about Valod. Sjt. Phulchand Bapuji Shah from Nadiad, who had experience of three campaigns and been a jail-bird at Nagpur with Dr. Chandulal and Sjt. Ravishankar, went on to Madhi. Sjt. Ambalal Patel from Borsad went on to Balda, and Sjt. Naranbhai, another worker from Borsad, was posted at Buhari.

For the Musalmans of the whole taluka Sjt. Vallabhbhai depended entirely on the help of the veteran Abbas Saheb Tyebji and Imam Saheb Abdul Kadar Bavazir of the Satyagraha Ashram of South Africa fame.

A campaign like this could not be carried on without a publicity department. The peasants could not be asked to subscribe to daily papers or even to

the weekly *Navajivan*, and outside papers could at best give an outside view of the campaign. A publicity office was therefore opened with Sjt. Jugatram Dave at its head. With an artist's pen and with a knowledge of the whole taluka at his fingertips, he took to this work like a duck to water. The arrangement was to issue a daily news bulletin and publish Sjt. Vallabhbhai's speeches in pamphlet form and to distribute them free to the agriculturists all over the taluka. For four or five days cyclostyled copies were issued, but arrangement was soon made to get them printed daily at Surat, and a start was made with 5,000 copies. The arrangement answered most admirably, the villagers waiting anxiously for the *patrikas* every morning and devouring the contents with avidity. All the Gujarati and almost all the English dailies of Bombay reproduced them *verbatim*, and as the movement gathered force, every important town and village in Gujarat began to get copies of the bulletin with the result that over and above ten thousand copies distributed in Bardoli, four thousand copies were subscribed to by places outside.

Swami Anand who had apparently left Gujarat for good returned at the call of Bardoli and placed his services at the disposal of Sjt. Vallabhbhai. His work as his personal secretary right up to the end of the campaign was of immense value.

Besides the principal workers, the agriculturists spontaneously raised volunteers from amongst themselves. They were to serve their own villages, and carry information to the nearest camp. The select ones from amongst them were to collect information, go about with the heads of their camps and run errands from place to place. Some of the best of these volunteers were provided by the Raniparaj community.

The actual work of organisation may be said to have begun on the very evening of the 12th February. Late in the evening within a couple of hours of the conference Sjt. Vallabhbhai started for Vankaner where he delivered a speech, which contained all the elements of his teaching, which rendered the taluka an impregnable fortress within a month or two of the launching of the campaign. The first point he laid stress on was about women taking as much interest in the campaign as men:

> "For the brunt will have to be borne by them. They will have to see their dear cattle seized before their very eyes, they will have to put up with the repeated attentions of attachment parties, and unless they are accustomed to take these things as a matter of course, they might easily betray you. I therefore want as many women to attend these meetings as men."

He had evidently Sjt. Mohanlal Pandya's letter of warning in mind when he said:

> "You must change your ways now, you will have to create an entirely different atmosphere. Have done with your wedding festivities as soon as possible. A people at war with a mighty Government cannot afford to indulge in these pastimes. From tomorrow you might have to keep your doors closed and locked, and betake to the fields only to return home in the evening. Government will try to raise people from amongst you to help in the work of attachment. You will see to it that they get none. Throw off your lethargy and apathy. You have earned a reputation which you have yet to do much to deserve. Now the die is cast and there is no turning back. You have to

vindicate Gandhiji's choice of your taluka as the scene of his first experiment in mass Civil Disobedience. You were about to fight freedom's battle for India, you have now to fight a smaller battle and prove that you were capable of fighting the bigger one. I am coming to your village straight from the conference because I want to reach as many of you as early as possible. I want you now to be on the *qui vive*. The Government will leave no stone unturned, will not scruple to use any means fair or foul, to create a breach in your ranks. I beseech you to forget your personal differences and petty quarrels. I want you to put an end to your factions and disputes, and to make friends of even your bitterest enemies. Only that way can you present a united front. I know that some of you are afraid of your lands being confiscated. What is confiscation? Will they take the lands away to England? The worst that can happen is that the lands might be transferred to Government in their books, but if you are united you can defy any one to come forward to cultivate those lands. And rest assured that when you are ready to allow all your lands to be confiscated, the whole of Gujarat will be at your back.

"Organise your village, and you will set an example to others. The campaign has begun. Every village must now be an armed camp. The news from every village must reach the taluka headquarters daily and punctually, and every instruction from the headquarters must promptly be obeyed. Discipline and organisation mean half the battle. Government have at the most one Patel and one Talati to every village. For us every adult in the village must be a volunteer."

CHAPTER VII

CLEARING THE POSITION

"Clear speaking is needed: a fight that is not clean-handed will make victory more disgraceful than any defeat."

— *Mac Swiney*

WHILST preparations were thus going on in Bardoli, Sjt. Vallabhbhai was carrying on correspondence with Government so as to avail himself of any opportunity that might yet be found in order to avoid a conflict. The reply to his letter of the 6th came at last on the 17th February in which the Governor-in-Council was said to "reiterate the statement . . . that he had no doubt that the history of the taluka in the course of the next settlement will be one of continually increasing prosperity,"—every exploiter might utter the same prophecy about the future of the exploited!—that "an experienced Revenue Officer Mr. Jayakar . . . for a period ranging over ten months travelled throughout the taluka and inspected each and every village," that "the Governor-in-Council is unable to ascertain your authority for the statement" that the principle of rental statistics had been relied on for the first time in the history of the land revenue in the presidency, that "Government have fixed lower rates than those recommended to them by their officers," that "they are not prepared to make any concession," and that if the people of Bardoli default in the payment of revenue, acting "on their own or yielding to the advice of *persons from outside*, they

would have to suffer the consequences." Sjt. Vallabhbhai could not but reply to some of these curious statements. He cited the statements of experienced Government servants in support of his statement about the rental principle—among them one by a responsible revenue official that "it was never up to now, I believe, the basis for fixing the assessment," he questioned the logical basis for the compromise of 22 per cent. enhancement arrived at by Government, and while thanking Government for their threatening the peasants with consequences, reminded the Revenue Secretary, that he evidently "missed the fact that the Government which you represent is truly dominated by 'persons from outside.'" "Let me assure you," he added, "that though I claim to belong as much to Bardoli as to any other part of India I have gone to Bardoli at the instance of its distressed inhabitants to whom it is open any moment to dispense with my services. I wish it were equally easy and equally possible for them to dispense with a rule imposed from without by force of arms which is daily sapping their vitality." The snub was enough to bring any one to his senses, but not Mr. Smyth. In reply he sent a letter beating the first one in brazen indifference, stating that "the public of Bardoli is not bankrupt nor in any way approaching to that condition. The population has increased and is increasing, and none of the symptoms of bankruptcy is present," that the opinions of "certain officials" quoted by Sjt. Vallabhbhai were not "authoritative pronouncements of Government," and that in calling Sjt. Vallabhbhai an 'outsider,' he had not written as a secretary to Government, on his own responsibility, but that "the letter, like this one, represents the considered views of His Excellency the Governor-in-

Council and is to be taken as doing so," and that if Sjt. Vallabhbhai wanted to make any further communication he should address it to the Collector of the district!

With the consent of H. E. the Governor, Sjt. Vallabhbhai sent the whole correspondence to the press with a covering letter in which he took an opportunity to reply to Mr. Smyth's last letter. His reply was a trenchant exposure of the perverse attitude of Government, and made absolutely clear the object of the Bardoli Satyagraha: "But the object of the Satyagraha in Bardoli is limited. It is nothing more or less than the assertion of a popular right, *viz.*, to demand an impartial inquiry in a matter which, as the correspondence herewith enclosed will amply show, is sufficiently contentious. The popular contention is that there is absolutety no case for enhancement of the revenue in Bardoli taluka. I have, however, not pressed that claim so much as the people's unquestionable right to demand an impartial inquiry. I have challenged the Settlement Officer's report, I have challenged the principle on which the Settlement Commissioner has proceeded. Let Government take up the challenge and prove that I am wrong. Even the Satyagraha pledge binds the agriculturists of the Bardoli taluka to pay up the old assessment as soon as Government are prepared to accept it in full payment of their demand or to appoint an impartial tribunal. An honourable Government should not find it difficult to accept either of the two alternatives."

It is a curious coincidence that just about the time that Mr. Smyth was carrying on that insulting correspondence with Sjt. Vallabhbhai and abusing him as an 'outsider,' the Finance Member of the Government of Bombay described the 'outsider's'

services in connection with Flood Relief in Gujarat in terms of admiration, and paid him this warm tribute:

"Business-absorbed Gujarat, till a few years ago, could scarcely boast of self-sacrificing public work. It must be an intense satisfaction to Mahatma Gandhi, that his labours for the creation of a band of selfless workers to be pioneers of missionary social activities, particularly in the rural areas, have met with an ample response, and that the volunteers mostly drawn from the Vidyapith should have acquitted themselves so creditably in the absence of their beloved leader in the face of an unforeseen calamity. How the mantle was at once taken by Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel and with what energy he carried out his plan of work is now well known."

It is a sad reflection that an Indian member of the Governor's Executive Council holding a public man in such high esteem and knowing him and his methods full well could not persuade the Government of which he was an important member to reconsider their decision.

CHAPTER VIII

GANDHIJI BLESSES THE MOVEMENT

" The invisible guide and vivifying example."

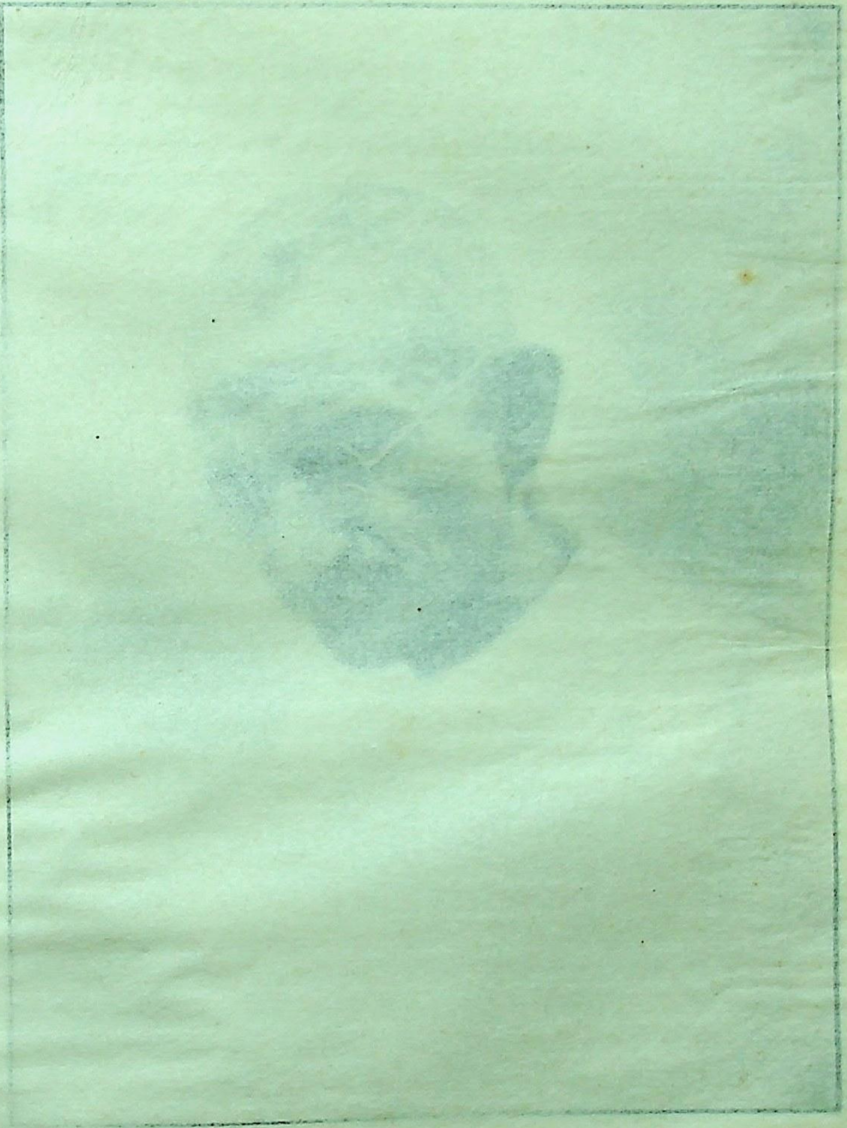
—*Rt. Hon. Shrinivas Shastri*

IT was well that Sjt. Vallabhbhai cleared his position, because as soon as the movement was started, papers from far and near began to describe it in their own way. These descriptions were full of honest and dishonest misrepresentation, as will be evident from the fact that sympathetic papers described it as "*the revival of the old Bardoli programme*" and as "a no-tax campaign," and unfriendly ones like the *Times of India* admitting Sjt. Vallabhbhai's "yeoman service in the best of causes," *viz.*, flood relief in Gujarat, described him "as fighting as the leader of a movement which, far from aiding Government, is directly aimed at its obstruction," and as "doing the peasants of Gujarat a rank disservice in encouraging them to take part in a lawless movement." In this connection one more misrepresentation is also worth clearing at the outset. It was alleged in interested quarters, that Gandhiji had remained aloof from the movement as he disapproved it. Well, it was left to the Rt. Hon. Shrinivas Shastri, who was then in South Africa, to describe in his own inimatably picturesque way

Gandhiji's part in the movement: "Like unto God, who, according to some philosophers, has started the inexorable wheel of *samsara* and seems no longer necessary,—He is the indispensable condition of its life,—so have you been the invisible guide and the vivifying example, active in the hearts of all and keeping them in the straight path." What Gandhiji thought of the movement, and how he helped Sjt. Vallabhbhai through the columns of *Young India* from the very inception of the movement will be evident from the following article which we reproduce in extenso from the issue of the 8th March written immediately after the correspondence between Sjt. Vallabhbhai and Government was published:

"The illuminating correspondence that has passed between Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel and the Government of Bombay regarding the assessment in the Bardoli taluka affords food for reflection to the public worker, and reveals in its true light the nature of the Government under which we are living. Vallabhbhai is not unknown to fame or to the Government. They have been obliged to acknowledge his worth as a public worker of great capacity, integrity and industry. They have acknowledged his great work in the Municipality of Ahmedabad. Only the other day he received unstinted praise for his philanthropic services in connection with the floods in Gujarat.

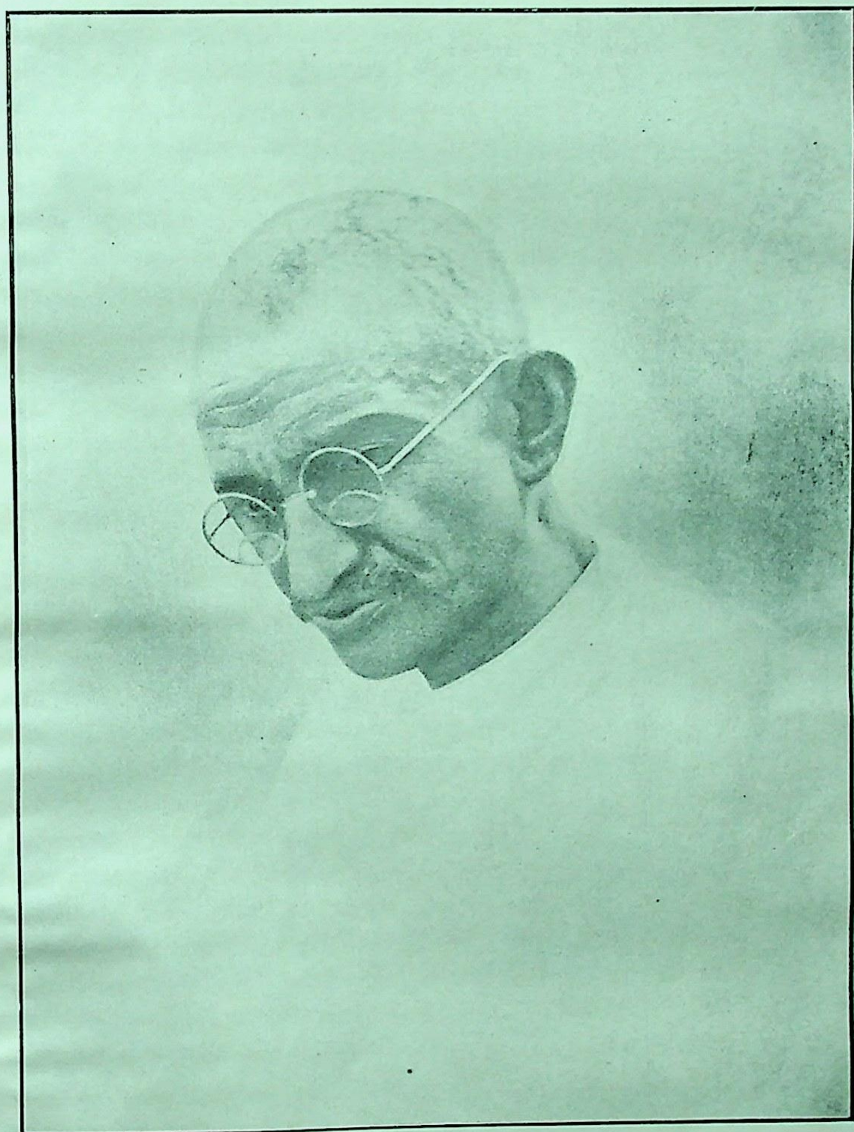
"But his work seems to have counted for nothing when they found him engaged in an activity calculated to cause them embarrassment and possibly loss of prestige and what is the same thing to them loss of their revenue. Their prestige they need for the sake of their revenue. They are no believers in empty prestige.



'The Invisible [illegible] Example'

Gandhiji's part in the movement: "Like unto God, who, according to some philosophers, has started the inexorable wheel of [illegible] and seems no longer necessary, which is the indispensable condition of its life, [illegible] the invisible guide and the vivifying example, active in the hearts of all and keeping them in the straight path." What Gandhiji thought of the movement, and how he helped Sjt. Vallabhbhai through the columns of *Young India* from the very inception of the movement will be evident from the following article which we reproduce in extenso from the issue of the [illegible] March written immediately after the correspondence between Sjt. Vallabhbhai and Government was published:

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'THE INVISIBLE GUIDE AND VIVIFYING EXAMPLE'

p. 66

"And so in their very first letter in the matter, they thought it becoming to insult Sjt. Vallabhbhai by calling in question his professions of good-will and describing him as an outsider in Bardoli. The last letter emphasises the insult by leaving no doubt that His Excellency the Governor too was party to it. Sjt. Vallabhbhai had courteously assumed in his letter that whilst His Excellency might be identified with a policy enunciated in Government communications, he need not be identified with the manner of expression, more especially the insulting language often adopted by civilian secretaries incensed over any the least resistance or independence betrayed by the public in their correspondence with them. That the Governor has chosen to become a party to the unwarranted insult shows how difficult it is for Governors, however well-intentioned and impartial they may be reputed to be, as the present Governor is, to escape the bureaucratic coil. 'Pride goeth before destruction and haughtiness before a fall.'

"But Vallabhbhai has a back broad enough to bear the wordy insults that the bureaucracy may choose to heap upon him from its safe and entrenched heights. My reason for dwelling on the insult is to draw attention to the utterly irresponsible nature of the Government that dares to insult a public worker of the foremost rank.

"But let us see for the moment what it is that has upset the Government. Land revenue is a close preserve beyond the pale of law such as it is. The regulation of assessment rests entirely with the executive authority. Every attempt hitherto made to bring it under popualar or judicial

control has failed. The Government must somehow or other meet the ever growing expenditure, bulk of which is military. Land revenue lends itself to arbitrary increase, as it affects the largest class and a class that has no voice, a class that can be squeezed without wincing. There would be an end to irresponsible government if the governed are either allowed to have a say in their taxation or to resist it successfully. Bardoli does not appreciate the increase made in its assessment. Its people approached the Government with petitions and exhausted all the means that are regarded as constitutional to secure redress. Having failed they invited Vallabhbhai to advise them and if necessary to lead them in resisting the Government through Satyagraha.

"Vallabhbhai investigated their case and though he found it to be just, sought to approach the Government with a view to save them embarrassment and spare the people prolonged suffering, and suggested an honourabe course, *i. e.*, suggested that if the Government did not admit the justice of the people's case, they should appoint an *impartial* tribunal to investigate the case on either side, and assured the Government that the people would abide by the decision of such a tribunal. This reasonable suggestion the Government has scornfully rejected.

"The public therefore are not called upon to accept the popular version as against that of the Government. They are asked merely to support the demand for the appointment of an *impartial* tribunal, and failing such appointment, to support their heroic resolve peacefully to resist the assessment and suffer all the consequences of

such resistance even including confiscation of their land.

"Sjt. Vallabhbhai has rightly distinguished the proposed Satyagraha from the Swaraj Satyagraha. This campaign cannot be properly deemed to be a no-tax campaign launched for the attainment of Swaraj as Bardoli would have done in 1922. This Satyagraha is limited in scope, has a specific local object. Every man has the right, nay, it is his duty to resist an arbitrary unjust levy as the Bardoli assessment is claimed to be by its ryots. But though the object of the proposed Satyagraha is local and specific, it has an all-India application. What is true of Bardoli is true of many parts in India. The struggle has also an indirect bearing on Swaraj. Whatever awakens people to a sense of their wrongs and whatever gives them strength for disciplined and peaceful resistance and habituates them to corporate suffering brings us nearer Swaraj."

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST MONTH

"The peasant is like a sack of meal."

SJT. Vallabhbhai's first speech had begun to tell, and before even a month was out the different camps were completely organised, and the leader of the campaign saw that his word was being literally obeyed. The statement read by Sjt. Govardhandas Chokhavala, the Darbar's assistant at Bamni, when the chief visited that place, is a sample of similar ones which were submitted at every camp whenever the chief visited it:

"There are 17 villages in our division, two of them being uninhabited. People from all the rest of the 15 villages are here today to listen to your message. Excepting at Kadod, which for the time being appears to be a plague spot in our division, people have put their signatures to the pledge in every village. These villages, we are sure, will stand until the last moment. Kadod is a tough job, there are not only people who would remain aloof, but people who would betray others. Our work up to now was to run errands and fetch news. But thanks to the *japti* operations which have just begun, we are making ourselves really

useful. The attachment officers come often enough only to find the doors closed or locked. We have provided our volunteers with drums and conches, and the moment they sight a Government servant, the drum or the conch gives the alarm. That is work which is after the heart of these youngsters."

This shows what an average camp was like in the first month. But let us turn to the happenings of the month.

In a battle of non-violent character, at any rate on one side, especially in a movement of passive non-payment like the Bardoli Satyagraha, the aggressive must come from the opposite side. The first shot was fired on the 18th February. In a taluka where notices of penalty for default of payment of revenue had been unknown for years, Government served notices asking the agriculturists to pay the full assessment within ten days, otherwise making them liable to penalty equal to 25 per cent. of the assessment—25 per cent. let it be remembered, of the new assessment which itself was 25 per cent. in excess over the old in most cases. The most important villages were picked out for this purpose, and the first attack was directed against 15 influential Vanias of Valod and another of Bajipura, evidently because Vanias were regarded to be the most vulnerable in the taluka.

There was nothing unusual in this, nor was there any violence. But in choosing another vulnerable point of attack they played a foul game and began with violence. A Talati belaboured a poor Raniparaj peasant in a village called Bedkuva. He used threats first, and when the man would not yield, he resorted to kicks and blows. In another case two men were unlawfully confined and let out only on payment of

the assessment. That is how the subordinate servants began the game on behalf of the Government. The Deputy Collector, a young man of no experience, who practically led the Government by the nose in this campaign, as Mr. Anderson did in the matter of fixing the assessment, resorted to more refined ways in the beginning. He summoned prominent people, reasoned with them and asked them to pay just a part of the dues. "Pay only a rupee, if only to please me," he would say in his cunning manner. "With all deference to you, sir," said the villagers, "how can we do anything without the consent of the whole village?" "But supposing I put you in jail?" threatened the Saheb. "Why should you, sir?" answered the unsophisticated peasant. "I am not guilty of sedition." The Deputy Collector laughed, suavely apologised to the villager who happened to be the most respected man in his village and let him go.

But evidently both the methods seemed to tell in some instances—not in the instances in which they were tried, but where they had not been tried at all. A number of Vanias in Kadod, which had been from the very first shaky, and where no notices had been served, paid up part of the assessment. It was certainly deplored, but it was far from having a demoralising effect. People quietly said that it was well that those who were shaky had dropped off in the beginning.

Far from being demoralised, they were daily realising the seriousness of the situation. The heads of several camps and volunteers were busy collecting signatures to the Satyagraha pledge, and every day brought the news of more and more villages having joined with their full quota of covenanters. The signing of the Satyagraha pledge was something solemn, and at the beginning of March there were only two or

three villages that had not yet wholly thrown in their lot with the rest, and a few stray landholders who had not yet made up their minds. The smaller landholders were everywhere anxious to sign the pledge, the bigger ones were in some places hesitating. But Sjt. Vallabhbhai's speeches had begun to tell. Master of the peasants' patois and peasants' idiom, he simply swept them off their feet by his soul-stirring eloquence. It is impossible to turn into English the full verve and vigour of his language. But here is a sample of those early speeches:

"I see that these 15 days have taught you to cast off fear from your hearts. You are however not yet completely free from it. Two annas in the rupee is still there. Shake it off. Why need you fear? If anything, Government has cause to fear. No civilised Government can govern without the consent of the governed. At the present moment they govern because your eyes are blindfolded, you are deluded into the belief that they are keeping you in peace and prosperity. It is not a reign of peace but a reign of fear. You have lost the capacity of righteous indignation against wrong. The absence of it is cowardice. I go about in your villages at dead of night sometimes without ever once being asked, 'Halt! Who goes there?' Ravishankar tells me with surprise that in these villages not a dog barks and not a buffalo flourishes its horns at a stranger! It is your quiescence that has been your undoing. want to inoculate you with fearlessness, I want to galvanize you into life. I miss in your eyes the flash of indignation against wrong."

The shirkers and doubters surrounded him at the end of the meeting with a request to be permitted

to sign the pledge. The effect in Sarbhon, a very important centre and stronghold of the Anavlas, was electric. The smaller ones came forward with their signatures first, and then one by one the bigger ones came until there was no one left in the village excepting a Government servant or two. We shall see later how these Government servants remained firm to the last although they did not actually sign the pledge.

The awakening among the Raniparaj was slow but steady. Some of the Vanias, who had paid up without even a notice being served on them, had also paid up on behalf of some of the Raniparaj people whose creditors they were. This was what was expected, but a considerable section, even amongst them, was perfectly determined. I paid a visit along with Sjt. Vallabhbhai to one of these villages. It was a Khadi village. Among those that attended the meeting there were not only the Khadi wearers and abstainers from drink, but even those who had not adopted Khadi, nor taken the pledge of abstinence. The latter, who heretofore had dreaded the former, now whole-heartedly joined them, thanks to the Raniparaj volunteers. The young women, who had taken the Khadi pledge three years ago in the presence of Gandhiji and shed their trinkets and heavy brass ornaments, were all there in spotlessly white Khadi, brimming over with joy and lustily singing Satyagraha songs.

The mention of the Satyagraha songs reminds me of one or two things that happened during the month. The number of local volunteers was of course increasing every day, but those from far off Kathiawad were also attracted. Among these were Sjt. Phulchand Kasturchand Shah with his wife, and his companions Shivanand and Ramnarayan. Phulchandbhai had already some songs

ready, and the atmosphere in the taluka gave him the inspiration for many more. These friends were posted at Valod, and thanks to their *bhajans* they were in great demand everywhere. The plain and homely songs spread the message of Satyagraha in a most effective manner, and men, women, and children had them on their lips. One cannot speak too highly of the part played in the movement by Phulchandbhai and his songs.

The women of course attended the meetings in large numbers, but they had as yet no leader of their sex to move amongst them. Shrimati Mithubehn Petit now arrived, and she with Shrimati Bhaktibehn Desai (the Darbar's noble wife) and other ladies were enough to spread the message among the women. Shrimati Mithubehn had of course another string to her bow. She had her message of Khadi, and she went about with a stock of Khadi to sell wherever she went. Belonging as she did to one of the most respectable Parsi families in Bombay, the effect of her going about in villages dressed in coarse Khadi and often barefooted with the message of Khadi on her lips and a bundle of Khadi on her shoulders was tremendous.

In the meanwhile the young Deputy Collector had succeeded in making a breach in the ranks of Valod. He had been busy tackling the Vanias, and he succeeded in finding two victims, both considerable landholders. They were advised to throw dust into the eyes of the village folk by keeping ready cash handy and allowing the Mahalkari and his men to come and attach it. The arrangement was perfect, and the Mahalkari went with a distraint warrant to the houses of both of these. Currency notes worth Rs. 1,500 and Rs. 785 were handy, and they were immediately attached. But the people

had seen through the pretence. The news spread like wildfire among the villages, and in Valod itself there was a storm of indignation. People immediately met to resolve to boycott the seceders. Sjt. Vallabhbhai reached the spot as soon as he heard the news. He reached there at a late hour in the night and thus pacified the indignant villagers:

> "It is not for you to give vent to wrath. Your pledge restricts you to non-violence, and non-violence excludes anger. The defection of these unfortunate brethren should serve to stiffen your resolve and to warn you for the future. You must not be angry with the two friends who fell a prey to the official machinations. They deserve your pity rather than anger. It is no use exercising yourselves on the thing that you could not help. It is a dirty thing, but do not try to probe it. If you do it, you will make your hands dirty. Surely you did not imagine that there would be no seceders in the movement. You seem to fear that if you let these people go scot free, demoralisation will set in. If those who have signed the pledge break them with eyes open, how long can you stop them? I beseech you not to take any stern measures against them. Find out if there are any more black sheep among you and persuade them to pay up sooner rather than later, if they are so inclined. Whatever happens, don't be alarmed. Let the Mahalkari chuckle over his precious gains. He will soon find his occupation gone."

They were pacified, but they would not make peace with the seceders until they had made sufficient amends. They went to them, reasoned with them and got them to tender public apology, and to promise

not to pay the balance of their dues. One of the two set the seal of earnestness on his contrition, by tendering Rs. 800 for the Satyagraha as a self-imposed and purificatory penalty.

Thus good had come out of evil, the evil was soon forgotten and the act of self-purification was the only thing that people were talking of. The very fact that during the whole month there had been only a few stray instances of defection infused more strength into the people who now began to strengthen their caste organisations. The Patels realised that their time too was soon coming. Though coercive processes had not been set in motion, the penalty notices had expired, and they would any day be required to help in the processes of distraint. Sjt. Vallabhbhai's message repeated in every speech had reached them well enough: "The Patel is the *mukhi* or mouthpiece of the village. His duty is to speak to the Government on behalf of the village, not to oppress his brethren by attaching their property in order to recover an unjust tax. It is his duty to tell Government that attachment work is below his dignity and self-respect." About sixty of them met in informal conference in Bardoli, had a heart to heart chat with Sjt. Vallabhbhai and resolved unanimously not to help in the dirty work.

There were meetings of the Raniparaj, and of Dublas and Dhedhs also, who resolved that they would not help the officials in carrying attached property or rendering any other assistance in *japti* work.

The news bulletins had begun to do their work. Other talukas of the district held conferences and sent expressions of sympathy, and the chief agriculturists of the neighbouring taluka of Jalalpur met in conference to concert measures to give active help to the Bardoli agriculturists. Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel, who was

requested to go and address their meeting, did not go there, but sent one of his co-workers with a message that the Bardoli agriculturists had done nothing to deserve their congratulations, and that they should very much hesitate to accept any monetary help from outside when they themselves had started no fund in their taluka, and when they had gone through no suffering. There was also a District Conference to be held in Surat on the 4th of March in order to express the sympathy of the district with the Bardoli agriculturists. Sjt. Vallabhbhai strongly advised the organisers not to have this conference until coercive processes had been set in motion by Government and until the Satyagrahis' capacity for suffering had been put to the test.

"We have done nothing yet worth advertising ourselves," he said, "and we ask all our friends to keep their sympathy and help in reserve until we have had our baptism of fire."

CHAPTER X

PARTIAL AMENDS AND APOLOGIA

"A departure from truth was hardly known to be a single one."

—*Richardson*

THE reader will remember, that in the very first letter to Government, Sjt. Vallabhbhhai Patel drew their attention to a serious irregularity about 32 villages in the taluka. Government in their reply resorted to quibbling, and explained it away by saying that no fresh notification was obligatory in respect of those villages which were put up in higher groups. The strength of the people however could not but have its effect, and Government issued a notification bringing down 22 villages out of these to a lower group, and partially rectified the Settlement Commissioner's blunder. As a result of the notification, three villages where enhancement of 20 per cent. had been recommended were brought under the original assessment, three in whose case the assessment had been increased 45 to 50 per cent. had their enhancement reduced to 18¾ and 20 per cent., two which had been recommended for 58 per cent. increase found the enhanced rate reduced to 20 per cent. and fourteen villages had their enhanced rate reduced to 25 from 50 per cent.

This was however far from being anything like a dawning of sense. Lest they should be misunderstood, the Government made it clear that their step affected only the grouping proposed, but not the "maximum rates of assessment."

The people saw, that though the notification rectified a serious technical error, it did not rectify the initial wrong that vitiated the whole case. The root evil lay in the fact, that the recommendation for enhancement had been based in the absence of any inquiry on wrong and incorrect data, and on the Settlement Commissioner's pet obsession, "the only sure basis of rental values."

The Government in lowering the groups of the twenty two villages had rectified only a technical error but left the root error intact.

Having done this the Settlement Commissioner and the Revenue Member put forward a worthless defence on behalf of Government. In reply to a question asked by R. B. Bhimbhai, M.L.C., the Revenue Member made the unblushing statement, that "in land revenue settlements a general economic enquiry is not strictly relevant; the true basis of assessment is rental value, for it takes into account all the relevant economic factors." That showed the extent to which the man with that pet obsession of rental values had infected the Government with his dangerous fad. And when he rose to address the Council on a motion of cut proposed by Sjt. Nariman on the question of the Bardoli settlement, he offered an apologia for Government of which he should have been ashamed.

Among the arguments that he advanced on behalf of Government one was that because the ryot had saved a good deal by abstaining from drink, he must

be prepared to pay extra revenue! Another argument was, that "the assessment which is being levied from the present year stands, as compared with the revenue levied in 1833, at the ratio of only 117 to 100. That is to say, that there is an increase of only 17 per cent. over the rates which were in force about a century ago." Now that was purely mischievous. The area under cultivation and occupation in 1833 was, according to Mr. Anderson, 30,000 acres, in 1928 it is in the neighbourhood of 1,30,000 acres. How has this rise in occupied area been brought about? The area brought under cultivation since 1833 represented in part waste land and largely land included under pasture and grazing or described as 'warras' in the old settlement reports. Now it used to be the practice in the days before 1833 to allow the agriculturists the free use of grazing land equal to a certain fraction of the land they cultivated. From 1833 to 1866 assessment of Re. 1 per *bigha* began to be levied, and since 1866 the land had been treated as *jirayat* land and subject to the assessment payable for *all jirayat* land. Let us now see what Mr. Anderson so complacently described as "only 17 per cent. increase over the rates which were in force about a century ago" really means. In Sarbhon division of the Bardoli taluka an agriculturist used to get 6 *bighas* of land free of assessment for grazing for every 20 *bighas* of land that he cultivated. That is to say, if we take Rs. 5 as the assessment per *bigha*, he had to pay until 1833

$$(20 \times \text{Rs. } 5) + (6 \times 0) = \text{Rs. } 100$$

for 26 *bighas* of land. But now he has to pay 17 per cent. more not only on the 20 bighas but the same rate of assessment on the 6 *bighas* for which he had to pay nothing at all. That works out as under:

$$(20 \times \text{Rs. } 5.85) + (6 \times \text{Rs. } 5.85) = \text{Rs. } 152.1$$

That is to say, the agriculturist who had in 1833 to pay Rs. 100 for 26 bighas of land has now to pay Rs. 152.1, *i. e., 52.1 per cent. and not 17 per cent. more than he had to pay a century ago* as Mr. Anderson would have us believe. But the agriculturist's loss is more than that. Under the old system of free pasture the agriculturist could afford to keep a number of cattle, and the cattle also throve, giving him a lot of rich manure. Today he is deprived of the free use of pasture, and the cattle are in as bad a way as the agriculturist himself, if not worse.

"Why then does not the agriculturist resign his lands?" Mr. Anderson asked. "There has been not only no case of resignation," argued Mr. Anderson, "but during the period of the last 30 years, none of these coercive processes have been resorted to, none have been necessary. And yet we are told that the assessment is too heavy!" Mr. Anderson, during his speech, was surprised at the statement that the assessment was too heavy, because he was thinking of the coercive processes having not been found necessary during the period. But he then seemed to have forgotten what he himself had said in the course of his report reviewing Sjt. Jayakar's report: "The general conclusion from all the recorded statistics is that the taluka in 1896 was either overassessed or assessed right up to the full limit of half the rental value"—the statistics the accuracy of which, be it noted, had been throughout challenged by Bardoli Satyagrahis. The question why the agriculturist does not resign his land was on a par with the question why if British rule is so oppressive, the Indians do not immediately throw off the yoke, or why, if there are irresponsible officials like Mr. Anderson or Sjt. Jayakar, the agriculturists do not dispense with their services. But the apparent anomaly

had been explained by none other than Mr. Smyth, the Revenue Secretary to Government, who happened to be Collector of Kheda in 1924, and this is what he said in the course of his reply to the Land Revenue Assessment Committee:

"*If it is asked how in such circumstances they* (*the agriculturists*) *can make a living, the reply is that their incomes are supplemented in the off seasons by work as labourers, by plying their bullock-carts for hire, and by selling milk, ghi, etc.*"

We shall not however canvas the matter any further.

One can have no quarrel with arguments of the kind we have examined. There was one thing however in that speech, of which, as we have said before Mr. Anderson should have been ashamed. Towards the close of his speech, borrowing Tennyson's fine lines put in the mouth of Sir Galahad, Mr. Anderson so utterly unlike that good Knight said, "Government's strength is as the strength of ten because their cause is just," and wound up with this peroration:

> "We have been told, that Bardoli has become famous throughout the world for its splendid gesture in civil disobedience a few years ago. Mr. President, I admit that it did become famous, but it is not a fame most of us would covet or care to attain, the fame of having been supremely futile and ridiculous. I say, let those who are now conducting this campaign know quite well, that as soon as the time comes for selling those lands, there will be plenty of people coming forward to buy them up. Neither violence nor absence of violence can prevent people coming forward to take up the good property when it is going. I beseech them, therefore, to think twice, lest in

marching to what they are pleased to call their Thermopylae, they do not by mistake find themselves at Panipat."

No one would grudge Mr. Anderson the happiness of his bluster, but one wonders at a Government that could tolerate that foolish reference to Panipat. Mr. Anderson may be blind to the fact that Bardoli had never prided itself on its glory; it had on the contrary regretted the fact that unforeseen events should have deprived it of an opportunity to get famous in history. But how could he be so utterly blind to the fact that in pronouncing that curse about Panipat, he was comparing the British Government with that depredator Ahmad Shah Durrani, and forgetting that poor Durrani's days in India were but few? As for the people of Bardoli they could not afford to forget the lesson of Panipat, and they, especially the Bardoli people, had the memory of the numerous battles in South Africa, and the recent battles of Champaran, Kheda, Nagpur and Borsad quite fresh to inspire them.

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST SHOW OF FRIGHTFULNESS

"Indeed the 'ablest Civil Service in the world' has laid the foundation of its greatness on frightfulness."

—*Gandhi*

BUT to resume our story. The penalty notices that had been served on the Vanias had no effect. The fact is that the people had now learnt to regard them as so many yellow sheets of advertisement or waste paper. The Talatis did go out on their distraint excursions but they were always futile. Sjt. Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishankarbhai and Darbarsaheb, who knew the *japti* officers' ways through and through, had completely initiated the people into the art of baffling distraint processes. Even the children in the villages knew what to do when they saw a Talati and *vethia* (village peon) approaching their houses. Local volunteers did not hesitate to go to these Talatis and *vethias* and read to them extracts from Sjt. Vallabhbhai's speeches, or tell them what Sjt. Vallabhbhai expected them to do. "Fearlessness is all that you want," Ravishankarbhai would tell the people. "Babar Deva, the outlaw, was a terror in the villages of Kheda. The Borsad campaign drove fear out of the hearts of the Dharalas, and even Babar Deva had to

remain in hiding." Every day added to a consciousness of their strength. A Raniparaj Patel, from whom not much would be expected at this stage, told the Mahalkari pointblank that he could not help in *japti* work, he had no peons and no coolies to carry attached property.

The various camps were getting stronger with the number of volunteers enlisting themselves in every village. The Darbarsaheb's camp was a right royal one worthy of the Darbar. A prominent man in Bamani had placed his furnished house at his disposal, and every evening there were prayers in which the whole village took part. *Navajivan* or Gandhiji's *Autobiography* would be read, and the congregation would disperse late in the night after singing some of Phulchandbhai's Satyagraha songs. This was a camp in a Patidar village. The camp in Balda was in keeping with its Raniparaj surroundings. A little shed made of a few dry stalks of *juvari* with paddy hay to cover the floor completed the camp.

One of the two deserters in Valod had made, as we have seen, sufficient amends. The other now volunteered with a purificatory penalty of Rs. 651. These instances inspirited the people so much that they sometimes exceeded the limits. At Kadod, a village which had not yet joined the movement, the attitude of two big landholders had much exasperated the people. Almost to spite the public as it were, they went on paying up assessment due from them on account of lands in different villages. All the people of these villages one day met to resolve not to cultivate the two men's land and not to provide them with any agricultural labour, and to boycott Kadod itself inasmuch as the other villagers were doing nothing to keep the men in control. It was with

very great difficulty that Sjt. Mohanlal Pandya could persuade them to drop the latter part of the resolution.

Different caste organisations now had their conferences, passed resolutions supporting the Satyagraha, and having nothing to do with purchase of property that may be attached or lands that may be forfeited, and appealing to people to make collections for the Satyagraha. Spontaneous contributions in kind were pouring in every day. So long as the different camps were in need of the provisions, this arrangement answered admirably, but later on an appeal had to be made to intending contributors to send their quota in money if possible, as it was difficult to dispose of grain etc. and maintain accounts.

The Government were going on serving penalty notices of which the number now exceeded several hundreds, and no one seemed to take notice of them. Even the Raniparaj had shed all fear and returned manly answers to a *saheb* like the redoubtable Deputy Collector.

"Why don't you pay up?" the *saheb* asked a Raniparaj.

"Yes, if you cancel the enhancement."

"You have to pay only a slight enhancement."

"How can we afford even that? We make our gruel of corn-meal boiled in ten times as much water and live on it. You grudge us even that!"

"If you don't pay, you will lose your land."

The peasant quotes in reply a couplet which is beyond the wits of the *saheb* who asks him to explain it.

"The king of flowers," he explains, "is the cotton flower. All the rest are nothing worth. The king of

kings is the god of rain. The rest are nothing worth. No king can confiscate our land. If that king, the god of rain, fails us, that alone would be a calamity."

Now this demonstration of strength and organisation was certainly disquieting. The Deputy Collector, who was guiding the campaign on behalf of Government, had expected and probably promised Government that the movement would not survive a few penalty notices on the weak Vanias. He was disillusioned. "There is no likelihood that Government will quake or falter in this matter," Mr. Anderson had declared in the Council. But the first shots had failed, and now was the time for something more drastic. So on the 26th of March a notice was pasted on the doors of Sheth Virchand Chenaji of Bajipura under the signature of the Mahalkari of Valod, to the effect that if he did not pay up Rs. 160-15-4 on account of his occupancy in Valod by the 12th of April the occupancy would be forfeited. On the same day similar notices were served on seven landholders of Valod. Absolutely unperturbed Sheth Virchand addressed a brave letter to the Mahalkari in the course of which he said:

"From the fact that out of the whole Mahal you have picked me for this notice, I am led to believe that you estimate me to be the weakest in the Mahal. I must however give you to understand, that even though the whole of the taluka is declared forfeited, no one is going to submit until the enhancement is cancelled or a proper inquiry granted.

"If you claim to be a loyal servant of Government, it is your duty to inform them of the true state of things in the taluka and help people to get the wrong righted. I humbly request you to find out some means of getting out of the odious

task of oppressing the people, when your time to retire is now so near. Rather than take the next step of forfeiting the lands of the agriculturists, I would suggest to you to resign. I daresay you have sufficient days of privilege leave yet unenjoyed. As your well-wisher I would ask you to go on leave prior to retirement rather than stain your honour by doing things which do not become you."

The other friends wrote to Sjt. Vallabhbhai assuring him, that "the Vanias who had the bad reputation of being weak and timid would belie that reputation. We had all bargained for this and more. Let the Government do their worst."

The effect of these brave statements was wonderful in the taluka. Every one now envied the good fortune of the eight gentlemen who had been sought out by Government for this honour, and who were now being congratulated everywhere. But the effect on the public mind was different. Strong feelings of resentment were expressed everywhere, the following little paragraph by Gandhiji in *Young India* being expressive of the attitude of the country:

"In answer to a question put by a member of the late Hunter Committee, General Dyer admitted that Jalianvala was designed to create frightfulness. In making the admission the late General enunciated no new doctrine. Indeed the 'ablest Civil Service in the world' has laid the foundation of its greatness on frightfulness. In pursuance of this well known policy, according to the information received at the time of going to press, it appears that summary steps are now to be taken against the farmers of Bardoli in order to compel submission. For eight prelimianary notices of

forfeiture have been served upon certain Satyagrahis of Bardoli. The names of these seem to have been carefully chosen, for all of them happen to be Vanias of note. The choice has been so made, presumably because Vanias, who have the reputation of being weak and timid, are expected to yield under notices of forfeiture. What can be more natural, officialdom would argue, than that Vanias weakening, the others must follow suit? Satyagrahis need not be surprised at this first show of frightfulness. They have been repeatedly told to expect forfeitures and worse. Let them now show their strength if they have it in them."

n his message to the Satyagrahis of Bardoli in *Navajivan* he explained what he meant by 'frightfulness' at some length. The article was hailed with delight in every village and read by the villagers over and over again:

"We should not have much minded if Government had issued a process of distraint for Rs. 160 the amount of arrears due from Sheth Virchand. But to forfeit land worth thousands for that paltry amount is nothing but Dyerism. That policy often goes beyond the Mosaic law of tooth for a tooth. The man who would exact a thousand rupees in lieu of a debt of a rupee deserves to be called a tyrant, a Ravana. Vallabhbhai has reminded you times without number, that Government have all the powers of forfeiture and imprisonment under the law that they themselves have made, and that Government have shown that they would never hesitate to use those powers. Let them not therefore be alarmed by these forfeiture notices. Let them rest assured, that neither Government nor a

traitor coming forward to purchase the land can swallow the land. It is like arsenic sure to recoil on them. Land is not worth more than sacred pledges or self-respect. There are thousands in this country who are quite landless. The land of many who owned it was washed away by the last year's floods and it is covered with sandheaps. If Gujarat bravely withstood that calamity sent by a heavenly power, let Bardoli bravely go through this sent by an earthly one and keep to its pledge."

CHAPTER XII

RECALLING OF 1921

"The Satyagraha shows no signs of abatement."

— *Times of India*

WE are in April now, and "the Satyagraha movement," bewails the *Times of India*, "shows no signs of abatement. . . . The effect of these measures of Government may not be apparent for three weeks or more, as the procedure laid down by the Land Revenue Code for the forfeiture of lands has to be gone through and it takes some time. There has been a certain amount of forfeiture of moveable property so far, but the forfeiture of land, which is evidently threatened by Government, is a far more serious matter to the agriculturists, and when they realise that the Satyagraha movement is not achieving the result that they were led to believe it would, it is likely that the movement will collapse." This extract affords a fair indication of the hopes and fears of Government, whose mouthpiece the paper had constituted itself during the whole campaign.

No fear however. Bardoli was slowly but surely standing up erect in defiance of all. the measures that Government's ingenuity could devise, and was beginning to attract the attention of all classes of

the public. There were meetings in talukas contiguous to Bardoli, not only in British territory, but also in the Baroda territory, for expression of sympathy with the Satyagrahis and calling upon people in their respective parts not to cooperate with the authorities engaged in putting down the Satyagraha, either by helping in the attachment of property by engaging as labourers or sending carts on hire, or by bidding for any forfeited property that may be put to auction by the authorities. Outside Gujarat there were special meetings held to discuss the situation at Bardoli. If one day there was a meeting at Poona to endorse the Satyagraha in Bardoli, the next there was a conference in Sholapur condemning Government action in Bardoli and congratulating the Satyagrahis. The Baroda Praja-mandal, at the instance of Dr. Sumant Mehta, roused the people of Baroda territory to their duty as neighbours, and though Sjt. Vallabhbhai had as yet made no appeal for funds, money was pouring in. Sjt. Manilal Kothari got a Bombay friend to donate Rs. 1,000 and a motor car. Friends in Johannesburg and Durban sent enthusiastic cables of sympathy backed by monetary contributions. There was a stir amongst circles hitherto not known to sympathise with Satyagraha, and even the over-cautious Bombay Presidency Association, which had prided itself on being always 'constitutional,' had no hesitation in passing a resolution strongly disapproving "of the enhancement of land revenue by mere executive action" in Bardoli and other talukas, and urging "that the revision of assessment be suspended in the Bombay presidency until effect is given to the recommendation of the Land Revenue Assessment Commitee by the introduction of a bill to amend the Land Revenue

Code for giving control to the Legislative Council on the revision of assessment."

Far however from taking any hint from the atmosphere around them, Government tried to justify their attitude, calling to their aid the manoeuvred Council vote of the 13th of March. They forgot the Council resolutions of 1924 and 1927, and gave the widest publicity to the adverse vote of 44 against 35, though they knew that 30 out of the 44 were officials and nominated members. Notifications telling people that the Council had endorsed the Bardoli settlement were published in all the villages of Bardoli, and a regular propaganda of mendacity was resorted to. The Government's way and the people's way presented a striking study in contrasts. On one side there were secrecy, underhand dealings, falsehood, even sharp practice; on the other there were straight and manly speech, and straight action in broad daylight. The Government representatives, the Mamlatdar, Mahalkari or Deputy Collector, never attended any meetings, had no open talks or conferences with people. They however tried to betray unwary, ignorant peasants, sometimes by threats, sometimes by false representations. Persuasion took the shape of arrant falsehoods like: "So and so has paid up. Why should you not pay too?" "so and so" being the name of some bigwig who had the reputation of being a Government man but who being afraid of the caste organisation was sitting on the fence. There was the case of a petty washerman who owed a few annas as assessment. The Talati paid the amount out of his own pocket and pressed the receipt into the washerman's pocket, expecting to make good the amount by getting a few clothes washed by him.

But the people as a whole were too circumspect to be taken in either by the Council vote notification or by the other devices. They generally avoided the officials who were left to stew in their own juice. Their organisation was complete, every village had its volunteers ready with their bugles or drums which were pressed into aid as soon as they caught sight of the Talati and Patel out on their *japti* depredations, and women stood in front of locked doors laughing at them.

And their meetings! Where a month ago one found not more than a few hundreds attending the meetings, thousands attended now. Where a month ago you did not find many women attending the meetings, or sometimes not at all, there was no meeting now but had its full complement of women, and often they outnumbered the men. I attended about ten meetings in two days, each day returning to the headquarters at about midnight. There were as many men and women present at midday as there were at a late hour of the night. In the scorching sun they walked miles to attend a meeting, and even at night men, women and children flocked to the neighbouring villages.

With the exception of one village, *viz.*, Kadod, which had obtained an unenviable notoriety, each village vied with the other in its unbounded response and enthusiasm. In Kadod those who were hesitating seemed to be now repenting, and they wanted Sjt. Vallabhbhai to go and address a meeting, as about fifty people had now come forward to sign the Satyagraha pledge. I attended the meeting with Sjt. Vallabhbhai, but it failed to impress me. But the other meetings! They were a sight for the gods to see. They seemed to remind me of the glorious days of 1921, and were in a sense

better than 1921 meetings. There was in 1921 an atmosphere everywhere in the country absolutely favourable to them, thousands attended meetings as a matter of course, and the people had not visualised the hardships and the sufferings that were bound to follow Satyagraha. There was then a sort of abandon in the atmosphere, and every village had caught the infection.

Today with numerous *japti* notices, and notices of forfeiture of lands valued at thousands, today with the absence of any atmosphere in the country, these brave peasant men and women of Bardoli presented a braver spectacle. But I shall describe one of the scenes. We visited Nani Phalod, a small village, at about 9 p. m. There was a huge procession of men and women, the former singing Satyagraha songs, and the latter singing a song from an old saint of which the refrain was: "All our sorrows have ended, now that the Master has come." As we sat down, we were confronted with a spectacle which was as embarrassing for Sjt. Vallabhbhai as it was gratifying and purifying for us. A string of women, young and old, came and bowed down to Sjt. Vallabhbhai, offered him sandal and flowers, put on his forehead the red mark of victory, and presented their mite for the fight. The thing went on for about half an hour. One of these women placed a five rupee note before him, and handed him a little note in her handwriting to this effect:

> "We are doing nothing out of the ordinary. This is a fight for our own interest, and for our hearths and homes. I am grateful to you for having taken the Satyagraha pledge from my husband, and I am here to give an additional pledge, that both of us shall willingly put up with whatever suffering that comes to our lot, in the

shape of forfeiture of property moveable and immoveable. I also promise that should my husband be privileged to be sent to jail, I shall cheerfully bid him godspeed."

I wish I had the power to present a verbatim report of one of Sjt. Vallabhbhai's speeches of these days. It was a treat and a tonic to hear him. I have already referred to the language and idiom of the speeches which had a peculiar flavour of the soil. Even if one could translate the idiom and the terse crispness of the language, how is one to reproduce the burning fire in the speaker's eyes and the masculine vigour of his tone?

The speeches were to the people the education of a lifetime. "Government has like a wild elephant run amok," he said in one of the speeches. "It thinks that it can trample anything and everything under its feet. Even so thinks the mad elephant priding itself on having trampled in the past even lions and tigers to death, and scorning the little gnat defying him. I am teaching the little gnat today to let the elephant go on in his mad career, and then get into his trunk at the opportune moment. The gnat need not fear the elephant. The elephant can never trample it to death, but the gnat can certainly prove formidable to the elephant."

"What is a little potsherd before a big pot? But it need not fear the pot, for a sherd can break the pot to pieces, but the pot cannot break the sherd."

Here is a third extract:

"Two months ago you were fearstricken. It was impossible for me then to collect together these big crowds, and sisters attending meetings were few and far between. But today your villages wear a different aspect.

You are today standing together like one man. . . . Greater trials are still coming. You have yet lost nothing, but later on you will be called upon to lose your all. I want you to understand however that the agriculturist will ultimately lose nothing. The agriculturist and the labourer are the two main pillars of the state. They are the real producers of wealth. But they do not enjoy wealth. How can you tolerate this state of things? Organise your taluka so that it may be a model to others. The longer this fight lasts, the better for you and worse for Government. You have as yet lost nothing. Even if you lose your lands and your belongings, you will have won fearlessness and vindicated your honour at a negligible cost. You have been until now hewers of wood and drawers of water. The fight will have taught you to come to your own."

In another speech he said:

"Remember the law of nature. You all know that you cannot have those heaps of cotton until a few cotton seeds are buried under the earth and destroyed. But they are reborn again with a larger life. And hardship and misery are not new things to you. Who puts up with heat, cold, rain, and all the inclemencies of weather, as the tiller of the soil does? Who puts up with the mosquitoes and other pests of our countryside as the agriculturist does? I assure you Government cannot inflict on you any greater hardship than you are already enduring. Go through it all with a will and a cheer and everything will be well in the end."

The speeches before the Raniparaj people were pitched in a lower key.

Pointing to the brass bangles and flimsy glass and stone trinkets of the Raniparaj women he would say:

"If they come to attach your property, greet them bravely and offer them your trinkets, offer them your bangles and let them wear them if they like."

Turning to the men, he would say:

"You fear that you will be called upon to assist in a *japti*. Shake off that fear. You are men, you are not *dublas*. Spurn that appellation of degradation. *Dubla* means weak and cowardly. Weak and cowardly are they who would exact labour from you. You are strong enough to labour in the fields, strong enough to carry burdens for yourselves and for others, how can you be called weak? I am told, that a Patel from a neighbouring village was threatened by the Mahalkari to be ordered to carry attached property, if he failed to find men to do so. The Patel should not have swallowed the insult. He should have said: 'It is none of my business. The men in charge refuse to do the dirty work. And so do I. You enjoy a high salary, sir. Rather than ask us to do the dirty job, why not do it yourself?'"

It may not be inappropriate here to mention the by-products of the movement which even those who disapproved of direct action as a legitimate or proper method of resisting injustice were likely to hail with satisfaction. There was, for instance, the closer contact and co-operation established between Hindus and Musalmans, and between the money-lenders and borrowers, as also between different sections of the same community. There were, for instance, two well marked divisions amongst the Raniparaj

people — the *varjits* (abstainers) and *avarjits* (non-abstainers). The divisions had been in existence since the anti-drink movement of 1921. The present movement brought them together again. In the meeting of the Raniparaj people that I have referred to in the preceding paragraph there was as large an attendance of the non-abstainers as of abstainers. Amongst the latter were men dressed in home-made Khadi, and women dressed in spotless Khadi *sadis* and without any ornaments on their persons. The non-abstainers included men and women whom the Khadi and anti-drink movements have not touched. Addressing these Sjt. Vallabhbhai said:

> "Sisters, I do not like those signs of slavery on your hands and feet. Your heavy brass ornaments accumulate a lot of dirt, produce all sorts of skin diseases and interfere with your free movement. You must shed them. Look at those clean-clad happy girls of your own community sitting opposite, singing Satyagraha songs. Would you not love to look like them? (A voice: Why not? They bathe every day and wash their clothes. They spin and have their own clothes. Another voice: They go to the *ashram* and learn songs there. We should love our women also to do the same.) I am glad you understand the difference. Now that you have joined this movement you must be proper soldiers. These foreign clothes ill become soldiers. You have strong hands and feet like those Khadi-clad girls. Why should you not have wheels from the *ashram* and start spinning? Within a few days you can have enough for your clothes. And you may not touch drink. Up to now you have remained aloof, not heeding our advice. But now that you have joined the

movement you ought to have the necessary fitness by abstaining from drink."

A civilising wave began to come over this section, as a result of the campaign, making it possible to bind the two sections together in ties of purity.

The other by-product, which I have slightly indicated in a previous chapter, was the growing consciousness among the Dublas and other communities from which the *vethias* were drawn. *Vethias* are village peons carrying errands and doing similar jobs, and for their remuneration they are allowed to cultivate free of revenue small plots of land. That hardly gives them enough to keep body and soul together, and they have necessarily to eke out their livelihood by other means. They were therefore free as birds and many refused to go and help in the coercive processes. This manliness on their part proved infectious. The Patels now regarded it a point of honour not to lag behind the *vethias*. Needless to say that the refusal, on the other hand, of the ordinary Dublas to help in *japti* work was bound to have a wholesome effect on the relations between the landholders and the Dublas who laboured for them. Those who had been up to now no better than menials and slaves came now to be looked upon as friends and brothers who had their share in the fight no less important than that of the landholders themselves.

The last, but not the least, was the growing Khadi atmosphere in the taluka. Miss Mithubehn Petit concentrated on the Khadi propaganda of course. With her untiring energy she would be on the move from morning until night, going from village to village, selling Khadi and asking women to spin. She also carried on in her own inimitable way Satyagraha propaganda amongst women.

I have given some extracts from Sjt. Vallabhbhai's speeches in this and the foregoing chapters. I shall now give an extract from the speech of one of his lieutenants. Speaking at Surat on the Jalianvala Bag Day — April 13th — Sjt. Ravishankar said:

"Today is the Jalianvala Day. I am wondering how the hardy Punjabis took those insults lying down. Possibly they had been helpless victims of the emasculating education that the Government have been imparting to the Indians. They had become so timid that many would not dare to submit true statements of their case when Gandhiji went there for inquiry.

"What then is national education? I am an unlettered villager and you need not be afraid of my inflicting a dissertation on national education on you. It is certain that education is something quite different from what we are having now-a-days. In this connection I remember an incident of 1921. I had been to see Gandhiji on some business. The constitution of the new Vidyapith (University) was being discussed and many of the intellectuals of Gujarat were there. The question being discussed at the moment I went was about the principalship. I did not quite follow the discussion, but one thing has remained in memory. When every one had had his say, Sjt. Vallabhbhai said, 'If no one is available, I should be willing to serve as principal. I shall at least teach the boys to unlearn what they have learnt,' and there was a peal of laughter. Most of them of course took it as a joke, but Gandhiji laughed at the fact that the rest had taken it so.

"We have seen since a number of schools coming into being and also disappearing like

mushrooms. That was because they were different from the Government schools only in name. The teachers in those schools had not unlearnt what they had learnt from Government.

"Well, he whose suggestion was laughed out that day has opened a school in Bardoli where he is educating 88,000 people. They are learning to unlearn what they had been taught up to now, they are now learning to ignore the Government that has unmanned them. Sjt. Vallabhbhai learnt his lessons at the feet of one who had unlearnt his orthodox learning, and he is now the principal of the great school of Bardoli. I am but a monitor there. The first lesson is finished, the second lesson of suffering and self-sacrifice has just begun. Our text book is the soul of Bardoli, the days and nights are the pages in it, and the daily happenings are the lessons."

CHAPTER XIII

THE PEASANTS' SARDAR

'Every burning word he spoke
Full of rage and full of grief."

I do not know who gave Sjt. Vallabhbhai the appellation of the Peasants' Sardar, but it was about this time that it was spontaneously given and taken up by every one who heard it. And no title was better deserved. One of the secrets of the Sardar's success in Bardoli was his burning love for the peasant and his overmastering passion to help him out of his woes.

It was in the year 1917-18 that Sjt. Vallabhbhai came under Gandhiji's influence and learnt from him the first principle of Indian nationalism—that the real India is to be found in the Indian villages and the peasant is at the heart and centre of it, and that no scheme of freedom or programme of work would have any meaning unless it was framed with special, even exclusive, reference to the peasant. And among those who devoted themselves to carry out the teaching, the names of the late Maganlal Gandhi and Sjt. Vallabhbhai stand out prominently. The master enunciated the principles, the disciples thought out their practical applications and gave all their time and energy to carrying them out in various spheres. And in this Sjt. Vallabhbhai had a special advantage not even enjoyed by the master. The son of an agriculturist,



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p. 104

he had taken his first lessons in mental arithmetic from the father who always took him with himself to the fields and gave him the lessons on the way to and fro. Those early days and that intimate familiarity with the sons of the soil created in him a strange fascination for the life of the peasant. I have been closely associated with the Sardar for over ten years now and have been with him in all his campaigns, but nowhere have I found him in his speeches referring to the peasant in the moving way in which he has done in Bardoli. The reason is not far to seek. In the Kheda campaign he was as much a camp-follower as any of us and rarely spoke. In Borsad the grievance for which redress was sought was a local grievance of a special character. But in Bardoli he came to grips with the root cause of the poverty of the peasant. The work was after his heart. He had seen the Kheda agriculturist getting more and more impoverished every day, and had watched his helplessness with deep concern and sorrow. To him therefore Bardoli came as a godsend and he saw that it was possible to give an object lesson to the whole of Gujarat through Bardoli.

His apotheosis of the peasant has a twofold basis—his keen sense of the very high place of the peasant in a true social economy, and his poignant anguish at the very low estate to which he has been reduced. "If any one is fit to walk with his head erect on this earth, it is the peasant. He is the producer, the others are parasites," he said in more than one of his speeches. But what a sorry plight he has been reduced to! "The whole world depends on you two—the agriculturist and the labourer, and yet you are the worst abused people on earth. I am grieved at the woeful state of helplessness to which you have been reduced. You shudder at the

sight of a worthless Government peon who can compel you to do his bidding. The Government taxes you according to its sweet will, and you have no voice in it. There is a soil rate, and a water rate, a special irrigation rate and a special subsoil water rate, even the improvements that you make at your cost and by your labour are taxed. You toil in the fields even as your own bullocks do from morning until evening, in biting cold, in scorching heat and drenching rain. You grapple with scorpions and wade through mud and raise a crop of rice to feed yourselves and your children. But even that rice must be taxed. Why are you so fear-stricken? Why are you so inarticulate? I feel deeply ashamed and humiliated at your plight. I shall feel myself blessed and all my labours fulfilled when I see you come to your own and walk erect like men." "That you who have the courage," he said, addressing a Raniparaj Conference, "to risk your lives in climbing the toddy and the palm trees, shooting straight up to the sky without a branch or a stump to afford a foothold, that a daring people like you should be afraid of people who fight shy of that adventure is incomprehensible, is intolerable." He believes with Voltaire that the present-day politicians "have discovered in their fine politics the art of causing those to die of hunger who, by cultivaiing the earth, give the means of life to others," and he burns with rage when he talks of the system which has made the peasant what he is and of those responsible for the system. "Who ordained that the Government should be the proprietor of the soil, and the cultivator a mere tenant? But it is on that theory, that a land tax is imposed on him which sucks him absolutely dry. And to complete the tragedy, Government have the support of our educated classes in that bleeding process."

The apotheosis is sometimes carried to an extreme. The peasant becomes the repository of all virtues, the paragon of perfection. "Where is there another so honest as a peasant, so free from bad habits and vices, so guileless, so Godfearing, living in the sweat of his brow? Why should such a man fear any mortal man?" A seeming contradiction, is it not? A man who is so pure and guileless cannot but be fearless. Not that the Sardar does not see the contradiction, but therein he gives us a picture of his ideal peasant, wants his peasant followers to approximate to the ideal and to throw off all fear. Perhaps in Bardoli he came across men and women more approximating to the ideal than anywhere else, and that is why all references to the peasants in his speeches were full of melting pathos. Whatever they may be or may not be, he had certainly no doubt that they had a certain faith in God which kept them loyal to their cause and made them hold tenaciously to their pledges. Indeed these simple folk vivified and gave form and shape to the Sardar's latent faith in God. As Gandhiji put it, "Vallabhbhai found his Vallabh (God) in Bardoli." He saw that nothing but faith in God could keep together the thousands of men and women bound to their pledge. It is through religion that he found his approach to the hearts of those simple illiterate men and women. "Land," he would say to these people, "would be found here, there and everywhere. But if a peasant betrays his pledge, the earth will cease to have its showers of rain. Let the peasant break his pledged word and he will ruin the world." The simple folk knew him and knew what he meant. And a leader had never a worthier following, and followers never a worthier leader.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SECOND STAGE

"Render all police perfectly useless by your peaceful behaviour."

— *Vallabhbhai Patel*

GOVERNMENT could not however contemplate the growing strength of the people with equanimity. The period of forfeiture notices had expired, and big demonstrations had become the order of the day. Four members of the Legislative Council — Sjts. Shivadasani, Dadubhai Desai, Bhimbhai Naik and Dikshit — visited Bardoli about this time, attended some of the mass meetings and were considerably impressed with the strength and solidarity of the people. Sjt. Shivadasani, a former member of the Civil Service, who resigned his post as Assistant Collector in 1922 on the imprisonment of Gandhiji, and who is now a member in the Council for the Surat district, said at a huge meeting in a Bardoli village:

"Even Sjt. Vallabhbhai could not have imagined that the taluka would be so prepared as it is today. If Bardoli stands firm until the last, this

fight will be the first nail in the British coffin. Some years ago when I was touring in your taluka in connection with my election campaign, you said you were like cows and wanted me to save you from the lion. You have now shed the fear of the lion and have become lions yourselves. The pledge you have taken is not only a pledge given to Sjt. Vallabhbhai, but to the whole country. Keep to it and you will win the battle both for yourselves and for the country."

All these M.L.C.s left Bardoli deeply impressed, and seriously cogitating as to how best to express their sympathy with the movement.

Meanwhile Sardar Vallabhbhai was taking stock of the situation, and he took a step about which he had been corresponding with the authorities for some time. There was from the very first no reason why the quit-rent in respect of *inam* lands, which were not subject to any enhancement, should not be paid. But possibly the Sardar was afraid lest his directions in respect of these lands should be misunderstood, and lest in some cases there should be demoralisation. There being no such fear, now that the people had been thoroughly educated in fearlessness and the principles and details of the fight, instructions were issued to the holders of such lands to pay up the assessment, provided they were given receipts for the same, and the amount credited duly in respect of the lands in question and no other lands. It may be mentioned in passing that the assessment on account of these lands did not exceed Rs. 8,756-12-0 out of a total revenue demand of over 6 lakhs.

There could be no better evidence of the people's strength and of the Sardar's confidence in it. At a meeting attended by the four M.L.C.s I have

mentioned, the Sardar gave a lucid exposition of his policy:

"The M.L.C.s are all our men, but in a sense they are our guests today. Their methods of work and fight are different. They fight the Government on the Government's ground. To me it is a dangerous game. It is a game of chance arranged by Government in which they play whenever they like with loaded dice. Our M.L.C.s call it a constitutional fight. Well, that constitutional fight is not for me. In fact, I am amazed that they are not still undeceived, for the result of their efforts is all loss and no gain. Mine is a game arranged by myself and I am quite at home in it. These friends, the M.L.C.s also, I am thankful to say, agree with me that there is no hope for us otherwise. . . . The agriculturists today are like the road-metal crushed flat under a steamroller which let us call the Anderson Patent Steamroller (An obvious pun on the word 'Anderson', that being the name of the Settlement Commissioner who had pressed into aid his theory of rental value to recommend enhancements in numerous talukas). We are fighting to see that in Bardoli at any rate we will not consent to be crushed under that steamroller. . . . The fight is not for the purpose of saving a lakh and a few thousand rupees. If I could be convinced that there was a case for enhancement, I should not have hesitated to advise the people to pay up. In Gujarat, which was last year ravaged by floods, the suggestion was made to me that we should agitate for a remission of the revenue. I said, 'No.' I said to the agriculturists that there was no excuse for asking for a remission. They had a

fair harvest and they might not plead the loss caused by the floods, they had already a loan of a crore to repay, that they had been granted by Government, they had had Government famine relief to the extent of ten lakhs and public famine relief to the extent of twenty lakhs. It was therefore their duty to pay. And yet I will say in all humility, that had not the Gujarat Prantik Samiti sent its men to give Government timely help, had they not distributed the seeds promptly, there would have been no crops, and Government would have sustained a loss of revenue to the tune of 50 or 60 lakhs. When, however, before launching the Bardoli campaign I wrote to Government that the condition of the agriculturists was everywhere getting worse and that they should not try to bring one or two talukas, that may be comparatively better, on a level with the rest, they said to me, I was 'an outsider'!"

But there was no room for explanation or reasoning now. The Government thought they had not done enough. Attachment and forfeiture notices had been tried apparently without result. They now set about devising more drastic remedies. The Commissioner of the Division, who was enjoying himself on the seaside, received telegraphic orders on the 14th April to go to Surat, the district head-quarters, and camp there, and the Collector, who was camping on the hills in a neighbouring Indian State was also similarly instructed. The Collector, for the first time after the launching of the campaign, now visited Bardoli, evidently to acquaint himself with the situation which he had up to now seen only with the eyes of his Deputy who was ever cocksure of crushing the movement. At Bardoli he found all the shops closed, the shopkeepers having

resolved not to open the shops during the day, in order to avoid attachment processes. He decided to go to some other place. Accordingly the police proceeded to hire a taxi. The driver, whose car had been engaged by the Satyagrahis, refused to break his engagement and place his bus at the disposal of the Collector. His licence was demanded, it was not with him, but he showed his brass badge, which he was asked to surrender. Another taxidriver whose car had been engaged by Sjt. Vallabhbhai was deprived of his licence too. The Collector marched to Sarbhon at a late hour in the evening. The youngsters on duty announced his arrival by a hearty beating of their drums, and all the doors were closed. The Patel was however summoned. He obeyed. He was asked if he had paid the assessment. He said he had paid the assessment on his *inam* lands, under instructions from Satyagraha head-quarters! He was asked to pay up for the other lands and to persuade the villagers also to pay up. "It is no use," said the Patel frankly, "I cannot pay, and the people will not listen to me and will not be afraid of forfeiture or worse." So the Collector gave him up, and went to another village. Next day he called a meeting of the Talatis, asked them to prepare maps of suitable lots of land which on confiscation could be given away to intending purchasers, and left for Surat, evidently boiling with rage.

Immediately on reaching there he issued a statement, or to be more precise, in an interview to the *Times of India* he said:

> "Many of the agriculturists are willing to pay the land and other taxes due from them, but these men are unfortunately being terrorised by threats of fire, violence and social boycott. If

the agriculturists follow the foolish advice given to them by the non-co-operators, who are conducting this campaign, most of them come from outside the taluka and hold no land in the taluka, and have therefore nothing to lose, it will be the unfortunate cultivators who will suffer in the long run. As a result of this campaign by the non-co-operation leaders, there is every likelihood of a disturbance occurring in the taluka."

That again shows the cloven hoof. It was a positive libel on the people to say, that they were terrorising others with threats of fire, violence and social boycott. The Collector as we have seen, was everywhere greeted with closed doors, and his libel could not have been based on the information of the people but of his subordinates. However that may be, he now took measures to ensure that if there was no disturbance in the taluka, it would be for no fault of his or of Government. A campaign of attaching buffaloes had already begun. Three special attachment officers were now appointed with special powers to employ summary methods of housebreaking and attachment. The police force was considerably supplemented, and a party of Pathan roughs was placed at the disposal of the attachment officers to take charge of the buffaloes and to help in the attachment work. It is a curious commentary on the officials who every day talked of crushing the movement, that they could not get local men or local labourers for the purpose, and had to go as far as Bombay to hire the service of the Pathans. The Hindu Mamlatdar was transferred to a distant district, evidently because he was not found to be doing his job properly, and a Musalman Mamlatdar appointed in his place, so that he might be better able to bring pressure on Musalman agriculturists and divide them against the Hindus.

Instead of the Talatis who used to report the Sardar's speeches, special C. I. D. shorthand reporters were posted in the taluka.

Undaunted by these measures the people were strengthening their organisation more and more. Kadod, the only village that had remained aloof, was now repenting, and a deputation of prominent men of the place waited on the Sardar to submit an apology on behalf of the village and to have it included in the Satyagrahi villages. Sjt. Vallabhbhai readily agreed. Before however he addressed the meeting at Kadod, a representation signed by several leading people from surrounding villages was placed before the Sardar, urging him not to accept Kadod in the fold without consulting other villages and without sufficient purificatory penance and guarantees. The Sardar advised them to be patient and forgiving, and asked them to accept Kadod with open arms, as sincere and genuine regret was sufficient security for their good-will and good behaviour in future. Kadod on the other hand, which was a new convert so to say, was trying to go one better than other villages by resolving to cut off supplies of provisions etc. to the attachment officer posted in the village. Sjt. Vallabhbhai in a long and moving speech expounded the principles of Satyagraha, and told them that their resolution was not in keeping with principles and must be cancelled:

> "In a struggle based essentially on truth and non-violence we must not do anything in resentment or anger. It is a sign of weakness. Our strength lies in cheerfully going through all sufferings that may be imposed on us. I can understand your refusing to assist the officers in *japti* work. In fact it is your duty to do so, but do not refuse them the ordinary

amenities of life. They must get whatever they want at market rates.

"I have read the Collector's interview given to a representative of the *Times of India*. I have been moving about from village to village for the last two and a half months, and I have not met one man who is willing to pay this unjust tax. On the contrary, since the arrival of the Collector I have received several reports of illegitimate and undue pressure being brought on the people, especially Parsi khatedars, who unfortunately happen to be canteen keepers; and the Excise officials' assistance is being invoked to bring pressure on them. There is hardly a single Parsi khatedar who has paid his dues willingly, and none of them is such as would refrain from paying for fear of violence and fire, nor have they any social relations with the people. In spite of all attempts at creating a division,—and therein lies Government's hope,—I have no doubt that you will disappoint them, and notwithstanding provocation, do nothing that would bring discredit to the movement. Let them break open your houses and your locks, let them take away all your belongings. Suffer them to do it smilingly. Do not lose your temper. Let them do what they like. If there are any people in the taluka who want to pay but who hesitate to do so for fear of fire and violence, I ask them to come to me and I shall take them to the Mamlatdar myself for payment of their assessment, and I shall assure them of all the protection they may need. But I am sure there is none such. No movement based on coercion or terrorism can endure for such a long time against a Government with limitless means of terrorism at

its disposal. It is my hope, and I am sure you all will help me to fulfil it, to render all police in this taluka perfectly useless by your peaceful behaviour. Render them idle and they will soon go back."

The Sardar's speeches were now full of a moral, almost a religious fervour. The emphasis up to now had been placed on fearlessness. It was now placed on peace. In fact the more the provocation offered, the greater was the emphasis on peace. The struggle had now reached the second stage, and the people had to face a greater trial than they had gone through before. I take another extract from the Sardar's speeches to show how day in and day out he hammered away at the single watchword of peace, and prepared the people for the fiery ordeal:

"Our struggle has now reached the second stage, and I have nothing more now to teach you as regards ways and weapons in our non-violent struggle. I am asking all my co-workers to stop speech-making, and leave it to me, if at all it is necessary at any place. I wish you to stop singing battle songs, as it is now time to sing only the praise of God even as these sisters have done this evening. Our sacrifice has commenced, let it be pure and spotless. We have now only to offer ourselves as spotless, willing victims. The Government is in a temper, and determined to carry out a policy of ruthless repression. High officials who never come in real touch with the people are exasperated, and are not able to understand why their subordinates are not succeeding in the task of persuading or terrorising people into submission and payment. They, therefore, distrust them. They have not the faintest idea of the

difficulties or of the plight of these subordinates. I hear reports of a large number of Talatis expecting orders of transfer from this taluka. Reports of probable arrests and prosecutions are in the air. All these are indications of the temper of the Government at the present moment. It is therefore our duty to be absolutely calm and collected, and to give them no chance of putting us in the wrong."

These instructons, it is needless to say, were implicitly followed.

CHAPTER XV

A REIGN OF LAWLESSNESS—I

"The Government which simply ignored you a little while ago is reckoning with you."

—*Vallabhbhai Patel*

BARDOLI was now the scene of frantic lawlessness. I had entitled the chapter 'a reign of terror' but I immediately corrected it. Terror was certainly intended, but no terror could be produced. If there was any terror, it was on the part of the Government which now entered upon a career of lawlessness.

It may be necessary to remind the reader that the Bombay Land Revenue Code contains the most drastic provisions for recovery of arrears. An ordinary debtor owing thousands of rupees to a creditor is liable to be sued in a civil court by the latter for the recovery of the debt. The suit takes months and even years, and when the court makes an order granting the creditor's claim, it takes into consideration the debtor's condition and often orders the debt to be cleared by easy instalments. But the agriculturist debtor owing arrears of revenue to Government is in a different case altogether. Government need not bring a suit against him. Under the Bombay Land Revenue Code the Collector of the district is empowered to recover

arrears of revenue by any or all of the following processes:

1. by forfeiture and sale of the defaulter's holding;

2. by distraint and sale of the defaulter's moveable property;

3. by sale of the defaulter's immoveable property;

4. by arrest and imprisonment of the defaulter.

There are certain rules limiting the application of these all-comprehensive provisions, such as the necessity of making a *panchnama* (declaration in the presence of witnesses of things attached), the exemption of cooking vessels and beds of the defaulter and his family, his tools and agricultural implements and of such cattle as may be necessary to enable him to earn his livelihood. There are also Government resolutions providing, that dwelling houses may not be broken into for the purpose of distraining goods for the recovery of arrears, and that no attachment may be made before daybreak and after dusk. It will be seen in this and the following chapters, that in Bardoli most of these rules were ignored, buffaloes which were in most cases the means for agriculturists to obtain their livelihood were attached, houses were broken into, and no *panchnamas* were made and attachments were made at all hours of the day and night. But I must not anticipate.

We have seen, that Government had already tried penalty notices, forfeiture notices and *japti* processes. They now taxed their ingenuity for finding out other means. The Parsi canteen keepers afforded an easy one. For under their licence they might not keep their shops closed and had hence not the immunity enjoyed by an ordinary shopkeeper. And in making their raids on these

liquor shops the officials cast all decency to the winds. Fancy, for instance, an official of the grade of Deputy Collector trying to bring pressure to bear on liquor-vendors with the help of excise officers and invading liquor shops and declaring big casks of liquor attached. The story does not end there. The casks could not be removed, so they were sealed and the shop closed and locked. The brave Parsi addressed a strong letter to the Deputy Collector, objecting to the procedure and holding him liable for the loss due to the closing of the shop and claiming rent at Rs. 5 per day for leaving the attached casks in the shop. He also stated in the letter, that the allegation made by the Collector that undue influence was being brought to bear on those who wanted to pay was entirely false, and that on the contrary he and other Parsi khatedars had themselves been victims of undue pressure from Government. It seems that the news reached the ears of the higher officials who disapproved of this bungling and ordered the shop to be immediately opened. The Deputy Collector's men ran post-haste to the shop, opened it at a late hour in the night, and took the Parsi shopkeeper to task for having addressed that letter. They were angry, that he should have dared to contradict the 'Badasaheb'—the Collector—and told him that his name would thenceforth be put on the black list.

It may be noted, that liquor, from the point of view of Government, is as good cash as currency notes, and they had no right to attach Rs. 2,000 worth of it for assessment amounting to Rs. 300.

The Parsi liquor-dealers were in an unfortunate position, so far as the Satyagraha movement was concerned. They had daily money dealings with Government, and Government never scrupled to credit

to the revenue account the money they offered for their liquor permits. In quite a number of cases money sent for a supply of liquor was credited as revenue dues. In one case an item of Rs. 700 was sought to be appropriated to revenue. The liquor-seller who went to make the payment said that he was not a landholder at all. The official thereupon threatened to appropriate the amount to the arrears due from some of his relatives! The man made no payment and left the place.

Raids for the attachment of buffaloes became the order of the day. There was no necessity for any formalities to be gone through, no necessity for ascertaining the ownership of the buffaloes, and therefore no necessity for passing any receipt to the owners, and certainly no necessity for any *panchnama*. The new Mamlatdar with a party of policemen marched at daybreak to a village, declared a herd of buffaloes attached without stopping to inquire whose those buffaloes were, whether they belonged to some one from whom revenue was due or some one who was not a landholder at all. 58 heads of cattle were lifted by a raiding party and driven to Valod. The notice affixed at the *thana* simply said: "58 heads of cattle belonging to Rama Govind of Sikar and others have been attached for arrears of revenue." The Pathans in charge of the buffaloes ill-treated them, belaboured them. One of the buffaloes impounded in the Bardoli *thana* died, adding blood guilt to the crime of lawlessness. It would appear that the agriculturists of the taluka were treated as a sort of unlimited liability company jointly and severally responsible for the arrears of revenue.

And all with what result? No result commensurate with the trouble. Fancy five policemen engaged in

leading a herd of 13 buffaloes! Big benches and bags of grain attached only to be left where they were for want of porters! Carts attached, but to be driven or drawn by Government peons, Pathans or the police!

The forfeiture notices, like the penalty notices during the first month, were now served in shoals, but no one heeded them. Vanias who used to be singled out as targets had been firm as rock. So the Musalmans were now selected, Ibrahim Patel of Bardoli being the first prominent man to receive the honour. Thousands of rupees worth of his land was announced to be declared forfeited, but he was absolutely unmoved. The Kanbis' turn had also come and they hailed the notices with pride and rejoicings. All the khatedars in Isroli were served with notices of forfeiture, and all the notices in Valod made absolute. One of the Valod Vanias, who thus lost all his valuable property, celebrated the event by inviting friends and soldiers of Satyagraha to a party.

There were huge meetings everywhere, attended by hundreds of women, laying heaps of yarn before Sjt. Vallabhbhai, as in 1921, and lustily singing *bhajans*. The invincible spirit of the people evidenced everywhere was bound to exasperate the officials even more. A number of false prosecutions now followed, the first man summoned to take his trial before the magistrate being Sjt. Ravishankar. A nobler sacrifice could not be thought of. He was to take his trial for criminal tresspass and for obstructing Government servants in the performance of their duties. This is how he came to be guilty of the offence. It would appear, that three carts were commandeered for removing the kit and luggage belonging to the Deputy Collector from the Bardoli *thana* to Valod. The man to whom the carts belonged came to realise his

mistake and went to the *thana* in company with Sjt. Ravishankar to call back his men. One of the cartmen, as soon as he saw his master, said, they were not at all willing to go but they were helpless. Sjt. Ravishankar pleaded with the Mamlatdar that if the men were not willing they should not be forced. He was orderd to leave the *thana* which he did; and the cartman leaving the cart followed him. The other cartmen also ultimately left leaving the carts in the *thana* compound. How this constituted criminal tresspass passes comprehension. Obstruction had of course been there, ever since the inception of the movement. All failure on the part of the officials to subdue the Satyagrahis, all failure to attach property and to dispose of attached property, could of course be interpreted as obstruction by public workers, and every one of the hundreds of workers in Bardoli could be brought under the penal section. But Sjt. Ravishankar was singled out for the first honour, and well did he deserve it. For with the exception of the Sardar himself, Gujarat had no more powerful and successful obstructor of the peaceful type.

Sjt. Ravishankar was tried by the resident magistrate, specially posted in Bardoli to try the cases arising out of the Government's campaign of lawlessness, and sentenced to 5 months and 10 days rigorous imprisonment for criminal tresspass and obstruction. I shall say nothing about the judgment here, as I propose to devote a special chapter to this magistrate's judgments. But the impression the sentence created may be judged by Gandhiji's message of congratulation to Sjt. Ravishankar:

"You are fortunate, satisfied with what food chance may bring, indifferent alike to heat and

cold, content to cover yourself with rags, and now the good fortune of going to jail has come to you before all others. Should it please God to permit us a change of places, and if you would be so generous, I should certainly love to change places with you. Victory to you and to the country. Bapu's blessings."

There were spontaneous *hartals* in the principal places of the taluka, and all workers now eagerly awaited their turn. Dr. Sumant Mehta, formerly Sanitary Commissioner in Baroda State, who had resigned his post for devoting his life to the public work which he had now been doing for over ten years, had been watching the movement with keen interest. He could not resist the temptation of plunging in to the fray now that Sjt. Ravishankar was removed. The Sardar asked him to take up Sjt. Ravishankar's place which he gladly did. He settled at Sarbhon with Shrimati Sharadagauri his gifted wife. Seven other public workers, including Sjt. Ramdas Gandhi, Gandhiji's third son, came down to Bardoli to work as volunteers.

The Government now felt compelled to issue two police notifications; the one over the signature of the Collector under Section 39 (1) (m) of the District Police Act provided, that no person should for a period of six months obstruct others in performing their duties, either by intimidation or threat to do injury, on any public road or street or place where public had access, and that no person should obstruct or terrorise those engaged in their lawful business near any Government or Local Board compound or building, or Government servant's compound and house where public had access, and that no one should obstruct animals or vehicles from using roads, streets or public places;

the other notification which was over the signature of the District Superintendent of Police prohibited the beating of drums, playing music or blowing conches or horns on or near public roads or public places or Government buildings.

The notifications proclaimed not Government's strength or resourcefulness but their bankruptcy. They proclaimed that Government could not get *vethias*, could not get conveyances, could not get men to bid at their auctions, and were mortally afraid of even their own hirelings going out of their hands. The first notification therefore laid an embargo on all persuasion. The embargo on threats one could understand, but there was not a single instance of threat or intimidation. And what a shame to have to stop by police notification the beating of drums and tomtoms by children and youngsters! The drums and tomtoms had prevailed against guns and firearms.

But in issuing these notifications the Government had counted without their host. The Sardar was no man to take a false step. He was no man to be hustled or intimidated, and certainly not to be deterred from doing what Satyagraha required him to do. He asked the villagers to dispense with drum beating or conch blowing. But he declared that the persuasion must go on as usual. It was lawless to suppress by law peaceful persuasion.

But the lawlessness was changing the aspect of Bardoli. The Sardar, thanks to his having been compelled to resign the Municipal Presidentship in Ahmedabad, was now giving his whole time to Bardoli, instead of three days in the week as during the first stages of the campaign, and every village in the taluka had thus the privilege of coming into his personal touch and under his magnetic influence. His

speeches had already been reaching them, but some of them had not yet come into his galvanising contact. They did so now, and they laughed with him when he laughed, and his mordant humour helped them to go through the agonies, that were daily heaped upon them, with a philosophic cheer. Take for instance this extract from a speech in Bardoli:

"Bardoli is having a unique honour. Armed policemen marching, and men with rifles on horse-back parading through its streets! The Government which simply ignored you a little while ago is now running up and down your villages in these dogdays of the year. The District Superintendent of Police also honours you with a visit in this scorching summer. It is no small thing. Is it a small honour that in a taluka like yours where processes of distraint have been unknown for years, three special officers should have been appointed for the purpose of attaching your property? Is it a small honour that special motor lorries should have to be requisitioned from Surat to carry property seized from your houses? It is due to Bardoli that petty peons and Pathans whom a bullock-cart was a luxury are now having joy-rides in Government motor cars!"

Or take this passage in a highly serious vein:

"Go on strengthening your caste organisation. No one can have anything to say against it. These handful of men, who come over here from a land 6,000 miles away, rule over us because they have a caste organisation of their own. Their close corporation is devised to protect even the wrong-doers amongst them. Why then should the Collector have any objection against our organisation? Their corporation always relying on brute

force has as its object the exploitation of the weak, ours has the only object of self-protection."

Or take this:

"Government wants disturbance, wants to provoke us into violence. Drums and conches have nothing to do with the question of revenue. Let us not quarrel with their notifications, they do not harm us, they cannot affect the issue. Refuse to be provoked, if they try to provoke you. Refuse to be embarrassed, if they try to embarrass you. Refuse to submit if they try to crush you. . . . The Government has lost its balance. The iron can afford to fling thousands of sparks, not so the hammer. If the hammer got hot it would burn up its own handle. A Government may wax as red hot as it likes. The people (the hammer) cannot afford to do so, and if they retain their equanimity, they are bound to cool the Government and beat it into submission and shape."

CHAPTER XVI

A REIGN OF LAWLESSNESS — II

" God hath many sharpening instruments and rough files for the polishing of his jewels."

—*Leighton*

But to go on with the story. The number of forfeiture notices now ran into four figures, and they covered land worth many times the total revenue of the taluka under the new revision settlement. One wonders why if Government had in their possession people's land worth many times their revenue demand, they resorted to lawlessness. The answer is simple. They wanted the people to yield submission to their imperious will. They knew that they could do nothing with the land. With all their boast of having found purchasers they knew that they could not dispossess the proud peasantry. They did not want the lands, they wanted abject submission.

Not satisfied with the appointment of special attachment officers, and reinforcement of the police strength, and with importing Pathans to lift and keep watch over the people's cattle, the Government brought in butchers to purchase the buffaloes, of which lots were sold for a song. This was lashing people to fury by outraging their cherished sentiments. The treatment of the animals kept in the *thana* compound was

getting more and more scandalous. One of them, as we have seen in the last chapter, died for want of care and without fodder and water. A prominent citizen of Bardoli approached the Mamlatdar with a donation for the proper upkeep of these unfortunate animals. The offer was contemptuously declined by the Mamlatdar who said, "Government have enough money in their treasury. They do not want your help."

This is how people were driven to shut themselves up day and night in their houses with their animals, as dear to them as their children. They could not bear the thought of their being left to the tender mercies of the Pathans, belaboured and starved to death, or allowed to live to be ultimately butchered.

And how shamelessly the whole business was done. A poor tailor, no landholder and from whom nothing was due, missed his three buffaloes one morning. He found at the end of two days' search, that they had been confined in the Valod *thana* along with a herd lifted some days before. He approached the Mahalkari and asked for the buffaloes. The Mahalkari had the audacity to tell him, "We have had to take care of the buffaloes for two days. You had better pay the bill for their upkeep and then take them away." "This, sir, is a strange way of doing things. Rather than compensate me, you would mulct me into the bargain." But the official refused to argue with him and showed him the door. "Well, then," said the tailor, "I shall consult the white-capped volunteer opposite and let you know," and proceeded to go. The Mahalkari got funky at the name of the volunteer, asked the tailor to come back and take away his buffaloes. This is only one of the numerous instances of its kind.

Here is an instance of a different type to show how the harpies did not even spare the poorest and the most innocent, as also to show how the meekest had come into a sudden realisation of their strength. The Mahalkari noticing the doors of a house open in the potters' street in Valod, ran into the house with policemen and Pathans in his rear, and finding a little box and chair asked the policemen to seize them. Premi, the housewife, who was inside, could not see what their intention could be. Sternly she shouted: "What are you about? I have no land, and therefore no arrears, and why have you come here? Get you gone."

Talati—Why no land? There is Rs. 15-5-5 due from you. Pay it up.

Premi—What nonsense! For five years we have not a clod of earth to swear by.

Talati—Then where is Keshav Uka's house?

Premi—How am I to tell you that?

Mahalkari—Then whose house is this? What is your husband's name?

Premi—I am going to tell you nothing of the kind. I have no land, I tell you get away.

Mahalkari (to his men)—Let us get out by the back door.

"You shall not," shouted Premi, standing in the way, and asking her girl to shut the back door.

The Mahalkari and his retinue turned ruefully away.

Let us return for a while to the case of the brave Parsi liquorseller of Valod, Sheth Dorabji, to whom I referred in the preceding chapter. It requires a rather detailed mention, inasmuch as it is a case of persecution of a member of the mildest community, and one which, so far as liquor revenue in Gujarat

is concerned, is the main prop of Government. One would have thought that Sheth Dorabji would be the last to be handled, but as he had the courage and manliness to stand up against the minions of law, he came in for an extra share of persecution. The case is noteworthy for another reason also. The shop was owned jointly by Sheth Dorabji and his mother-in-law Navajbai. An old lady, absolute stranger to the ways of the depredators and naturally nervous, must have often vacillated between daring and losing all and submitting to the persecution. Probably she preferred the first course because of the courage of the son-in-law, probably because the sufferings of the people around her steeled her heart. However that may be, she stood firm till the last.

But to narrate the details of the persecution. The Mahalkari and his men, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, went to the shop again, removed the sentry and the lock and ordered Dorabji to run his shop. He said he could not until they had removed the attached liquor. So they attached some of the empty casks lying in the shop and proceeded to empty the liquor in those casks. They were discovered to be leaky, and a lot of liquor was spilt, of course at Dorabji's expense. They then procured empty casks, carried the booty away in a taxi and sold the liquor, not by auction, but privately to another Parsi liquorseller, who was under their thumb, for Rs. 98 and odd. Perhaps this man's is the only case of a man in the taluka purchasing property attached during the three months' regime of lawlessness. Having thus disposed of liquor worth Rs. 2,000 for less than a twentieth of its value they served on Sheth Dorabji notice of forfeiture of Rs. 30,000 worth of his land for the recovery of Rs. 144-6-8 which they still alleged to be the arrears of

revenue due from him. Nothing daunted, the brave Parsi addressed another letter to the Deputy Collector bringing to his notice all the official misdeeds, and asking him to render an account of all the property attached and the money realised, and telling him that no amount of terror and oppression would break his and his taluka's resolve.

In the last chapter we noted the case of Sjt. Ravishankar. Close on its heels followed the trial of Sjt. Chinai, who was in charge of Bardoli proper and who had distinguished himself by welding the many interests and communities of Bardoli into an indivisible whole. Like Sjt. Ravishankar he was tried for offences under Sections 186 and 189 of the Penal Code, for obstructing the Mamlatdar in his public duty and for intimidating *vethias* with social boycott, and on the most flimsy evidence he was sentenced to two months and 20 days' rigorous imprisonment on the first count and 6 months' rigorous imprisonment on the second count. I propose to notice the judgment in a separate chapter.

Up to now the workers sentenced were seasoned soldiers, both of whom had served their time in jails doing hard labour. Now came the turn of a local worker, a prominent citizen of Valod, Sjt. Sanmukhlal. It was he who had rendered Valod an impregnable fortress. Of course Dr. Chandulal, Sjt. Phulchand and others were there, but they would not have been able to do much without Sjt. Sanmukhlal. It was he who bore the brunt of the whole struggle, and kept the men of his community — Vanias — together. The youngest of them all, but the most respected, he wielded an influence in the taluka that the hoary-headed might envy. Along with him two other workers Sjt. Shivanand from Kathiawad, Sjt. Phulchand's trusty campanion, and

Sjt. Amritlal also from Kathiawad and posted at the Valod camp, were summoned to stand their trial for resistence to authority, for obstruction and other offences. I visited Valod to attend the special meeting held to give a send-off to these workers.

The meeting was much larger than any I had seen in the place, and during an hour and a half that it lasted a solemn silence reigned. Sjt. Vallabhbhai said that he would not have gone to Valod, if only the two Kathiawad workers had been arrested. He had gone there to honour Sjt. Sanmukhlal, the leading worker of the place and one of the most respectable residents of Valod, who had the privilege of being the first in the taluka to be chosen for the honour. Sjt. Sanmukhlal's old mother attended the meeting, and though she was not exactly bubbling with enthusiasm, she was proud that she had the privilege of offering her son as the first sacrifice in the taluka.

I have refrained from transcribing the speeches of Sjts. Ravishankar and Chinai, as there was nothing extraordinary about them, coming as they did from those tried soldiers. But Sjt. Sanmukhlal's case was entirely different. A young man born in luxury as he was, jail-going was a strange thing for him and stranger for his mother. But the quiet and unassuming young man, with an education just enough to enable him to carry on his agriculture and business, made a brief speech which was as truthful as it was manly, and I am tempted to translate it in full:

"I am proud that I should have been the first in the taluka to be selected to go to jail. My joy is heightened by the fact that though I am to be charged under Section 189 I am absolutely innocent. I have held out no threats of injury nor have I intimidated any one. The thing is not in my

nature. My friends and relations are pressing me to engage lawyers to defend myself. I would tell them that not even a hundred lawyers would be able to shake the determination of the magistrate to convict me. And why should I defend myself when I welcome the honour and am prepared cheerfully to undergo whatever punishment is inflicted on me? I should like to assure the taluka and the Government that this mild *vania* will never disgrace his taluka. My only regret on this occasion is that I shall not have the privilege of participating any more in the struggle that is thickening day by day. My relatives are possibly afraid that my easy life outside may not allow me to stand the rigours of the jail. I assure them that I am going there with the name of God on my lips, and He will enable me to go through whatever is in store for me.

"I am proud that Valod is in the forefront of this fight for truth and justice. I appeal to you, my comrades, to carry on the good fight and to send a stream of volunteers to the jail. Do not be taken in by the wiles and trickeries of this Government ever anxious to divide you. Above all, sacrifice all your belongings and your possessions, but never for a single moment betray our chief. May God give us the strength to go through the trial that is still to come."

For a violent contrast to the above, one had to attend the trial that took place the next day. Sjt. Sanmukhlal was tried for having held out threats of injury to a public servant. The Talati, who was the principal witness, with his scared look, showed not so much that he had suffered from Sjt. Sanmukhlal's threats, as possibly the threats of his superiors to ruin

him if he would not be their willing instrument in this trial. The prosecutor was practically putting whole words and sentences into the mouth of this scared creature and of other witnesses who followed, so much so that the magistrate had to warn him more than once that he should allow the witnesses to reply to questions and not volunteer the replies on their behalf.

But I must not anticipate myself. These farcical trials deserve a special chapter for themselves, as I have already said, and I shall not delay the narrative. Sjt. Sanmukhlal was sentenced on the evidence of that Talati to six months' and Sjts. Shivanand and Amritlal to nine months' rigorous imprisonment—two consecutive sentences on two counts made up out of the same offence! This happened on May 15.

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CHAPTER XVII

A REIGN OF LAWLESSNESS — III

"*I promise you weariness, hardship and battles. But we will conquer or die.*"

— *Garibaldi*

THE number of forfeiture notices now exceeded 1,500. There were fresh acts of lawlessness every day, all of which it is neither possible nor necessary to mention here. Some typical cases may be noted.

A Christian *japti* officer stole into the back yard of a house in a village. The owner of the house, an old widow, had only a small field which she had already gifted away in charity. The Talati informed her that the transaction had not yet been registered and the field still stood in her name. Rs. 4 only was the amount due from her. The *japti* officer seized her buffalo worth Rs. 100 and offered to release it if the old woman paid up her due. No fear. She preferred to lose her buffalo.

A cart in an enclosure in close proximity to a road attracted the attention of the *japti* officer. He got one of his Pathans to break through the hedge and get into the enclosure. How was the cart to be

taken? The village Patel was not there, nor any one to whom the prize could be entrusted. "The Patel is to take charge of this cart. Be it known to all, they will be held responsible for it," the officer and his Pathans shouted in the air and left the place!

Sheth Virchand Chenaji, whom the lawlessness of the Government men had made famous in spite of himself, would not be left in peace even after his land was declared forfeited to Government. His horses were attached. One morning a *japti* officer got into the unused portion of his house, removed the ironsheet partition, got into the back yard and attached pots and pans, utensils and grain, things they might not attach under the law.

At about 6 o'clock one morning two Patidars from Pisad, a village in Baroda territory, were going to their place, leading 4 buffaloes with their young, which they had purchased in Bardoli. The moment they were sighted, some Pathans and armed policemen who were lying in ambush pounced upon the animals and seized them. The owners remonstrated saying they were Baroda State subjects and that they owed nothing to Government. The *japti* officer said: "Go and apply to the Mamlatdar." The men went back to Bardoli and tried to get at the Mamlatdar. He was not there. The simple peasants came again to the officer who again referred them to the Mamlatdar. Not ready to lose their animals so easily, they went back to Bardoli. After considerable delay their petition was heard by this august official, who said in reply that they must apply in writing to the *japti* officer!

Here are some instances of house-breaking:

A *japti* officer and his party got into the back yard of a house in Delvada, loosened the hook on

the door and stole into the house, only to find that the house belonged to one who was not a khatedar, and left.

The same official removed the door of a houes from its hinges, entered the house, and seized a bench and some pots and pans in the absence of the owner.

An overzealous *japti* officer and his party carried a bunch of keys with them. One of the keys was successfully tried on a lock, the party then entered the house and seized a buffalo.

These instances can be multiplied. A revolting case of a Pathan's assault occurred in Madhi where a *japti* officer with his Pathans went for his operations before daybreak. One of the Pathans effected his entry into the back yard of a house, and as he was proceeding to enter the house, the wife of the owner ran into the house and proceeded to close it. The Pathan pursued her, pushed the door open and as she began to shut it again, caught her by the hand and pulled her out, and attached five animals.

The event sent a thrill of horror in the taluka and throughout the country, as soon as Sjt. Manilal Kothari who was on the scene and who took the woman's statement published it in the press.

I shall content myself with only a reference to the way in which the buffaloes were sold for paltry amounts to butchers and men of straw imported from outside, and the way in which for want of bidders moveables were sold for nominal amounts to Pathans, policemen and peons, who in some cases were allowed to bid publicly and for whom the auctioneers themselves often made the purchases. The way in which, attachment officers receiving a salary of Rs. 150 to Rs. 200 a month, in company with hired Pathans and

policemen, chased the buffaloes day in and day out and often night in and night out, was humorously described by a wag who thus parodied Tennyson's famous lines:

"Pathans to the left of them,
Pathans to the right of them,
Pathans in front of them,
Police at the tail of them,
Marched the Buffalo Brigade."

About the same time as that outrageous behaviour of the Pathan or a little while before this, 19 men in Vankaner were arrested on a charge of rioting and obstruction. Some of them were released on bail, some preferred remaining in custody to giving bail.

The Musalman Mamlatdar, who had been trying hard to break the Musalmans, had partly succeeded in Vankaner by getting some of them to pay up their arrears. These had never signed the Satyagraha pledge. But in Mota, one of the biggest villages in the taluka, a few landholders who had signed the pledge were prevailed upon by the officials to pay up.

Instead of these blacklegs demoralising their fellows, there was every day a new accession of strength in the taluka. The way in which even the little children had caught the spirit of the struggle can be realised from the scenes witnessed at a meeting in Malekpur. The village was in Sjt. Ravishankar's group. Morarbhai Bhikhabhai's daughter, aged about 13, welcomed the Sardar, presented him with a purse of Rs. 41 on behalf of the women of the village and made an *improptu* speech which thrilled all through and through:

"Though we are sorry that our divisional captain has been imprisoned, our village is

absolutely solid. Pray accept this small amount on behalf of the sisters of this village. A number of forfeiture notices have been affixed in our village today. We rejoice over them. My sister and I have told our father to go to jail at the first opportunity. We have assured him that we shall till the land in his absence."

In the meanwhile Sjt. Vallabhbhai's educative propaganda was spreading far and wide. His speeches penetrated the hearts of the simple peasants, and men from far and near, men from villages in neighbouring talukas and in the Baroda territory, flocked to villages in Bardoli to listen to the Sardar. Speaking on the recent defections in two villages brought about by the sub-inspector and his evil company he said:

"The Government is trying its level best to spread as much poison in the taluka as possible through our own men. These men are ours, but beware of them. Like thieves in the night they are trying to create breaches in our ranks. They are always on the look-out for our weaknesses, they flourish on them. The drunkard tempts the drunkard amongst us with drink; the bully intimidates the timid amongst us with all sorts of phantasms and fears. Beware of them and their falsehoods. Don't go within miles of them. . . . And even if a handful from amongst you fall victim to their wiles, don't be alarmed, don't flinch from your resolve. Even a victorious army has its casualty list, and has its deserters. If blacklegs are discovered, understand that it is so much dirt and stain washed away. Challenge the Government to take up your land and carry it, if they can, to England. Challenge them to surround the taluka with machine guns and

aeroplanes. We have no armed force, but we have a better and a purer force to pit against it — the force of truth, the force of our allegiance to our pledge."

At another place he said: "Let them capture your buffaloes and other property. They cannot capture your souls. The infatuation for possession is no good. How much land does a man require? The Musalman not more than two cubits and a half and Hindus that much only for a couple of hours. God is always with the right." At a certain stage in the speech the bellowing of the buffaloes impounded in the *thana* close by was heard, and that gave the Sardar an opportunity for his sardonic humour. "Reporters, please note it down,— the buffaloes are speaking. The Government thought that drums would subvert Government established by law. These buffaloes, I tell you, are as bad as the drums. (Still louder bellowing) They are bellowing themselves hoarse to tell you if you do not know yet that Right and Justice have vanished from this Empire."

In another speech he said:

"If there are any amongst you who feel any misgivings, or are afraid of the fire of repression, they had better go on a pilgrimage or betake themselves to some hill station or breezy seaside place while there is yet time. For let there be no mistake in the matter. As agriculturists you know, that the dark rain-laden clouds so welcome to your sight come only after you have passed through the parching heat of the summer months of Chaitra and Vaishakha, and not before; and the refreshing showers of rain descend only after we have had terrific storms and lightning and peals of thunder which rend the skies. Similarly Government is

not going to do you justice until it has put you through the fire. It will try to cajole you, if you are willing to be cajoled. But if you resist its advances, it has its iron fist ready with which to descend upon you. For, understand, the issue with Government is not merely one of losing a few lakhs of rupees of land revenue. It can raise a crore of rupees today, if it wishes, by arbitrary taxation. But it is afraid, and rightly too, lest if we win the battle, the whole of India may do tomorrow what Bardoli is doing today. Similarly you have to realise on your part that it is not merely yourselves that you represent but you hold in your hand the honour of the whole of India."

While the people were getting firmer in their resolve with increasing repression, some of them did think of devious ways of foiling the officials' activities, *e. g.*, by placing spikes on the roads to burst their motor tyres, rendering the roads impassable by barricades or hedges and what not. There was nothing in the word or behaviour of the Sardar that would countenance any such procedure. "I want to convince the Collector," said the Sardar, "that if ever violence breaks out, my own head will be the first to go. I repeat and will repeat for the thousandth time, that this is a non-violent fight, a fight in which you grow more and more in quiet strength. I have come to teach you to die with a smile on your lips, not to shed a drop of blood. Or rather who am I to teach you? You learnt the lesson first, I learnt it after you. Some of you have had the honour of fighting in South Africa under the banner of him who first gave the *mantra* of *ahimsa* to India. You are old boys in the school, I am comparatively a tyro in it. I have therefore no new lesson to teach

you." And in yet another speech: "I may in all humility say that I regard myself as a watchman responsible for the peace of the taluka. I hold myself responsible to the man who is now watching the movement from his peaceful abode in Sabarmati. I prize more than anything else his name and his work which I cannot allow to be besmirched by a single mistake or error."

CHAPTER XVIII

A COMMISSIONER'S VAGARIES

"A stray hair, by its continued irritation, may give more annoyance, than a smart blow."

— *Lowell*

NOT content with driving a coach and four through all the provisions regarding distraint of moveables and forfeiture of immoveable property, the revenue officials in Bardoli were bringing pressure to bear on other departments. They found ready tools in the Excise Department and the Agricultural Department. In a very large number of cases payments made on account of liquor permits were credited to land revenue, and most of the persecution of Sheth Dorabji, liquor vendor of Valod, was carried on through Excise officials. How the Agricultural Department came to be pressed into aid is interesting. Some of the agriculturists in the taluka who borrowed cotton seed from the Agricultural Department sold their cotton through the Department. The seed was distributed, let it be remembered, for propagation of improved methods of agriculture, better seed, etc. The cotton that the agriculturists brought in for sale was held in trust for them by the Department. In one case the Mamlatdar attached cotton bales in a gin,

thus held in trust by the Department, and the Director of the Agricultural Department was ordered to pay up the proceeds of sale amounting to over Rs. 73,000 for recovery of arrears of revenue due from agriculturists to whom the cotton was supposed to belong. The Director, it seems, refused to be used as a tool and put up a fight against this flagrant breach of trust, but in vain. In several cases licencees for the possession of arms were deprived of their arms and their licences, and pensioners enjoying their pension for services already rendered were threatened with forfeiture of their pension rights.

The Commissioner now got hold of a ready tool in an old Surat doctor. Dr. Edalbehram is a man of good intentions and has some social service to his credit. How he could not see through the Commissioner's game is more than one can say, but it may be safely asserted that the Commissioner successfully exploited his philanthropic instincts. There was no doubt that the agriculturists were going through a fiery ordeal, there was no doubt that they were in for untold miseries if Government did not accede to their demands. The Commissioner, it would appear, played on the good doctor's instincts of compassion, and persuaded him to write a letter to the press and then to himself, in the first asking the agriculturists of Bardoli to pay up their dues and then to agitate on constitutional lines, and in the second asking the Commissioner to indicate to him how he might be of service in the crisis. It is not to our purpose to discuss those two letters of the good doctor. Suffice it to say that he was not a voluntary agent. What is germane to our subject is the Commissioner's letter addressed to Dr. Edalbehram which the former used as a peg to hang his infamous sermon on. I should

not have advertised the Commissioner and his letter by transcribing it in full in a narrative of the heroic struggle meant chiefly to serve the cause of non-violent resistance against wrong. But trifles at times give rise to cataclysms, and as Lowell has said, "a stray hair, by its continued irritation, may give more annoyance than a smart blow." It is because the Commissioner's letter, however trifling it was, served to make Bardoli an all-India issue and to attract the nation's attention to it, that it deserves a place in this narrative. Here is that letter:

"Camp Surat,
8th May, 1928.

"DEAR DR. EDALBEHRAM,

"Many thanks for your letter. I am quite sure that the articles you wrote were inspired by that goodness of heart which has made you devote your life to the cause of helping poor lepers and not by any Government officer.

"Before starting stern measures to recover the dues of Government, I did my best to persuade the agitators from Kaira to give up their campaign. Government officers could not place the case of Government before the people of Bardoli as they have been subjected to spying, mobbing and other indignities. Any one who approached them became suspect and was subjected to threats of excommunication. The ears of the people have been closed to the arguments which Government have put forward in Council and which induced the Council to reject the vote of censure by 44 to 35.

"No one is more anxious than I am, that the poor cultivators should not be ruined by the swarm of agitators who are living on them and misguiding them. I have made it quite clear to R. B. Bhimbhai

Naik, M. L. C., that I am willing to investigate the case of any village which can show reasonable grounds for supposing that it has been wrongly grouped, provided the refusal to pay the revised assessment (amounting to an increase of about 20%) throughout the taluka and mahal is abandoned.

"Government cannot give up taking every possible measure to recover the revenue. Every revision lawfully introduced would be challenged. The agitators now in Bardoli are the same men who conducted the no-tax campaign in Kaira District in 1918 and they have adopted almost the same methods to prevent those who want to pay from paying, *e. g.*, threats of excommunication, social boycott and fines.

"There are 5 talukas in Kaira District from which these agitators come, the revision settlements of which have been postponed for 2 years on account of floods. Nearly half a crore of rupees has been advanced by Government in Kaira District for flood relief in the last 7 or 8 months. If they succeeded in Bardoli, the recovery of Government assessment and *takavi* in Kaira District would be imperilled.

"You can make any use of this letter you like. What I have written is not confidential but states well-known facts.

Yours sincerely,
W. W. SMART."

So far as Sjt. Vallabhbhai was concerned, he did not allow himself to be irritated by the choice epithets showered on him by Mr. Smart, who only a few days ago described him as "a personal friend" in a personal letter addressed to him. Mr. Pratt, who, as Commissioner of the Division,

ten years ago, had put up a stiff fight on behalf of Government in Kheda, had the courtesy to refer to Gandhiji as 'a friend' and 'a pure and saintly character,' and to Sjt. Vallabhbhai as 'Meherban Vallabhbhai Saheb.' Mr. Smart possibly thought that it was impossible to refer to an opponent except in terms of abuse. But it was no use for Sjt. Vallabhbhai to quarrel with Mr. Smart's culture. He however exposed the gross lies that he had dared to utter in that letter. Having never yet found time to visit Bardoli, the Commissioner had the audacity to say, that "Government officers could not place the case of the Government before the people of Bardoli, as they have been subjected to spying, mobbing and other indignities." Sjt. Vallabhbhai assured the Commissioner in a public speech, that he would arrange a meeting of the 17,000 agriculturists of Bardoli, if he condescended to address them (as Mr. Pratt used to do in 1918), but he also told him that people would certainly leave Mr. Smart's subordinates and hirelings severely alone in the prevailing atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. Sjt. Vallabhbhai was however thankful, that the Commissioner had absolved the people of Bardoli from the charges of threats of fire and violence levelled at them by the Collector in an interview given only a short while ago. As regards the 'agitators' imperilling recovery of assessment in Kheda, Sjt. Vallabhbhai reminded Mr. Smart that if the so-called agitators from Kheda had not rushed to the assistance of the flood-stricken in Gujarat at the risk of their lives and supplied them food, clothing and seed in the nick of time, the Government machinery would have been unable to cope with the situation, and Government would not have been able to recover land revenue amounting to lakhs of rupees during the current year

from the flooded area, as the people could have raised no crops without prompt assistance. Besides, he added, Government had been able to save a large amount of money by the opening and running of cheap seed and timber depots at various places by those very agitators whom he had chosen to libel, and to say the least, it was very unkind of the Commissioner to insinuate that these persons would imperil the payment of *takavi* and assessment if they succeeded in Bardoli.

But it was for the country to express its feeling of indignation against the insults and libels in the letter, and there could be no better indication of it than an article by Gandhiji in *Young India*, which I reproduce *in extenso*, to show not only the intensity of popular feeling, but Gandhiji's anxiety to clear again and again the only issue in Bardoli, and to keep the people within the bounds of non-resistance of evil and of self-restraint:

"The Bardoli campaign is going on merrily. At the rate the forfeiture notices are being served, practically the whole of the taluka of Bardoli should be in Government's possession, and they can pay themselves a thousand times over for their precious assessment. The people of Bardoli, if they are brave, will be none the worse for dispossession. They will have lost their possessions but kept what must be the dearest of all to good men and women,—their honour. Those who have stout hearts and hands need never fear loss of belongings.

"But forfeiture notices having failed, the Government are now adding to them the imprisonment of workers. They are holding mock trials such as we saw during the Punjab martial law days. The

prosecutor is asking for, and the obliging special magistrate is giving, deterrent sentences which are all rigorous. These too like dispossession will do good to the willing victims. Suffering willingly undergone never harms the sufferer.

"What however goes against the grain is dishonesty and insolence of office. The Commissioner Northern Division has written a letter to a correspondent which is full of insulting insinuations and untruths.

"It is an untruthful insinuation to suggest that the campaign was started by Kheda agitators. It was started by the Bardoli people themselves, and the only person whose help and advice they sought was Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel whom, I presume, the Commissioner knows somewhat. Whether he can truthfully be called agitator in the sense intended by the Commissioner must be left to the reader to judge.

"It is untruthful to say that the officers of the Government are subjected to 'spying, mobbing and other indignities.'

"The workers are described as 'the swarm of agitators living on them (the people of Bardoli) and misguiding them.' This is an insult for which, under better times and if the nation was conscious of its strength, the Commissioner would be made to offer a public apology. Let him know, that those whom in his anger and intoxication of power he calls a 'swarm of agitators' are honourable servants of the nation giving their free services to Bardoli at considerable sacrifice. Among these, besides Vallabhbhai Patel, who is a barrister, are the hoary-headed Abbas Tyebji, another barrister, and an ex-Chief Judge of Baroda,

Imamsaheb Bavazir, who is practically a *fakir* needing no support from Bardoli, and Dr. Sumant Mehta and his equally cultured wife. Dr. Sumant Mehta, who has been ailing for some time, has gone to Bardoli at considerable risk to his health. These four by the way do not belong to Kheda at all. Then there is the Darbarsaheb of Dhasa and his intrepid wife Bhaktiba who for the sake of their country have sacrificed their estate. They are not living upon the people of Bardoli. There are Doctors Chandulal and Tribhuvandas again not of Kheda. Add to these Phulchand Shah, his wife and his lieutenant Shivanand (already in gaol). These again do not belong to Kheda and have for years dedicated themselves to silent service. It is the wail of Bardoli that has called these and others whom I can name. If the Commissioner has any sense of honour about him, he will volunteer an apology to these ladies and gentlemen. In fact the Kheda workers are in a hopeless minority among the numerous workers.

"The Commissioner pompously trots out the adverse vote of the Bombay Council, and conveniently suppresses the two previous votes of the Council that had gone against the Government and that were by them treated as beneath contempt and beneath notice.

"The Commissioner suppresses the very relevant truth, that before resorting to direct action, the people of Bardoli tried every means known as constitutional to get redress, and hopelessly failed.

"The Commissioner throws dust in the eyes of the public, when he suggests that if the sorely tried people of Bardoli give up their campaign, he

would gladly investigate the case of any village that may be found to have been wrongly grouped. He suppresses the truth, that the point at issue is not the wrong grouping of this village or that; the point at issue is the palpably wrong method of assessment. And *the people of Bardoli do not insist upon their point being accepted, but they do insist upon an independent and impartial tribunal being appointed to investigate the justice of their complaint, and offer to abide by the judgment of that tribunal whatever it may be.* Here there is no shirking of payment, no question of redress of individual hardship. The question is one of principle. The people of Bardoli deny the right of the Government to dictate without proper investigation any increase in the assessment. Let me add, that this is no no-tax campaign launched for any political end. This is a campaign directed towards a well defined specific grievance affecting the people of a whole taluka.

"It is therefore the height of impudence and gross untruth for the Commissioner to say:

"'No one is more anxious than I that the poor cultivators should not be ruined by the swarm of agitators who are living on them and misguiding them.

"'There are five talukas in Kaira District from which these agitators come, the revision settlements of which have been postponed for 2 years on account of floods. Nearly half a crore of rupees has been advanced by Government in Kaira District for flood relief in the last 7 or 8 months. If they succeed in Bardoli, the recovery of Government assessment and *takavi* in Kaira District would be imperilled.'

"If the 'agitators' succeed, it will not be the *takavi* to Kheda that will be in jeopardy. If it is withheld by the borrowers, the Government will find the arch-agitator Vallabhbhai Patel to be their unpaid Collector of the loans. What however will happen if the agitators succeed is, that the Government officers will not dare to insult honoured servants of the people and utter untruths as the Commissioner Northern Division has done, and that the people will be able to have some redress against grossly unfair and unjust assessment as the Bardoli assessment is claimed to be.

"One word to the people. The Government, in their wisdom and in order to emphasise the fact that this rule is sustained by the policy of *divide et impera*, have drafted in the midst of an overwhelmingly large Hindu population Musalman officials and Pathan hirelings. As Satyagrahis the people can easily checkmate the Government. Let them treat the officials and the Pathans as friends. Let them not distrust or in any the slightest manner fear or molest them. They the officials are our countrymen, the Pathans are our neighbours. Ere long the Government will discover their mistake, and know that the honour of a Hindu is as dear to a Musalman as to a Hindu and *vice versa*. The people of Bardoli have the chance of demonstrating this in a concrete manner. Let them vindicate the law of Satyagraha which is also the law of love, and they will melt even the stony heart of an autocratic Commissioner."

CHAPTER XIX

CYNOSURE OF ALL EYES

"A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation."

Is. lx. 22

BY the end of May Bardoli was the talk of all India. It had stood the fire beyond all expectations, it had belied all the gloomy forebodings of doubters and cynics. The much-abused Vania in Bardoli had amazed all his traducers. The immolation of one Parsi was enough to attract the attention of the entire Parsi commnnity, and the machinations of the Musalman Mamlatdar had failed to touch the two brave Musalman khatedars of Bardoli who were a real tower of strength to the movement. The heroism of the simple unsophisticated women of Bardoli was an inspiration to all women outside Bardoli.

As one went from Ahmedabad to Bardoli, one could not fail to notice the remarkable public awakening about the Bardoli Satyagraha. In Bombay itself every Gujarati you met was anxious to have the latest news about Bardoli. You might have missed some of the Bardoli publicity office's news bulletins, but your Bombay friend had missed none and was eager to know the further developments. Until the

beginning of May the Sardar had refused to entertain all suggestions for issuing a public appeal for funds. But on the 9th of May he issued an appeal, now that Bardoli had been doing its part well. With the exception of one or two outside contributions which amounted to Rs. 2,000 and odd, all the contributions received up to date had been from Bardoli and without any appeal in that behalf. These exceeded Rs. 10,000, and included contributions from women of almost every village in Bardoli. The Sardar's appeal was backed by Gandhiji, and the response to it was as prompt as it was unreserved. A number of friends I met in Bombay were anxious to send their quota to the fund, but had not done so, not knowing where to send it. A lady in Bombay had already sent her first instalment of Rs. 500, and now she supplemented her second instalment with a promise to send the same amount monthly as long as the struggle lasted.

"As the up-train takes you to Valsad," I wrote in *Young India* in the third week of May, "it is a discussion about Bardoli going on amongst the passengers, that wakes you up in the early hours of the morning. 'Where will these things lead to?' asks one. Another who has been on the scene of operations describes in vivid detail the *Pathan-raj* in the taluka: 'We can tolerate everything, but we cannot see our buffaloes tortured by the Pathans. And now, of course, as you must be aware, they have transgressed all bounds of decency. A Pathan stole through a *vada* at the back of a khatedar's house in Madhi. The wife of the khatedar ran post-haste into the house, and as she was closing it from inside, the Pathan rushed at her, pushed open the door violently, caught hold of the woman and pulled her out. What does this signify?

Where will these things end?' Another man who entrained at Navsari said: 'The *japti* officer in Sarbhon is an Anavla Brahman. The unfortunate man has no wife, his son committed suicide by poisoning himself, and he has none to support. What is he doing all this for?' I had occasion to travel by a day train too. The Bardoli publicity leaflets were in the hands of many passengers. Some of them were reading Sjt. Vallabhbhai's speeches aloud, and discussing the situation. As I passed through the streets of Navsari, with my haversack on my back, a Parsi came running after me to ask if I had the Bardoli leaflets in my haversack!"

This shows the silent awakening, that the publicity office's bulletins had been bringing about in Gujarat. But the Sardar, though he had issued an appeal for public funds, was firm in his resolve to retain the local and circumscribed character of the Bardoli issue. Sjt. C. Rajagopalachari and Sjt. Gangadharrao Deshpande, who were in Ahmedabad about the time were anxious to visit Bardoli to see things for themselves. Gandhiji advised them not to go, and Sjt. Vallabhbhai appreciated the advice. On hearing the news of the death of Maganlal Gandhi, Gandhiji's 'best comrade,' Sjt. Vallabhbhai was anxious to go to Ahmedabad. Gandhiji wrote to him not to do so, and said: "It is a heavy loss, but it should not disturb your programme. You cannot stir out from Bardoli at the present moment. Do not hesitate to write to me for any help you may need. Please understand that I am at your beck and call, ready to start whenever you want me." Much as the Sardar would have loved to have Gandhiji in Bardoli, he refrained, as he knew that Gandhiji's presence there would be a signal to all India to rush to Bardoli.

But in spite of the Sardar, the struggle was fast attracting widespread attention in the country. The Commissioner's letter, describing the Sardar and his co-workers as "a swarm of agitators living on the people of Bardoli," was naturally felt as a national affront, and the Working Committee of the National Congress that met in Bombay passed a resolution that rang through the country:

"This meeting of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress congratulates the Satyagrahis of Bardoli on the brave stand they have taken against the Government of Bombay, who have refused an impartial and independent inquiry that the Satyagrahis demand for an examination of the enhancement in assessment in that taluka, which enhancement they claim is unjust and made on a wrong and unjustifiable basis; and thanks Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel and his band of volunteers, for rendering, at considerable sacrifice, timely assistance to the Bardoli Satyagrahis, and appreciates the action of the M.L.C.'s who have resigned their seats on the Bombay Council as a protest against the high-handed policy of the Bombay Government;

"This Committee places on record its strong disapproval of the measures adopted by or on behalf of the Government of Bombay which appear to this Committee to be in several instances lawless, and in any case far in excess of the requirements of the case;

"This Committee has read the letter addressed by the Commissioner of the Northern Division to a Surat medical practitioner, in which the Commissioner describes tried and trusted servants of the nation such as Sjt. Vallabhbhai

Patel, Sjt. Abbas Tyebji and Dr. Sumant Mehta as 'a swarm of agitators living on them (people of Bardoli) and misguiding them,' and which contains many gross exaggerations bordering on falsehoods, and regarding, as this Committee does, the tone of the letter as highly offensive and unworthy of a high official, asks the Government of Bombay to compel the Commissioner N. D., on pain of dismissal, to withdraw the letter and offer a public apology for it;

"And this Committee asks the Government of Bombay to comply with the reasonable request of the Satyagrahis for an impartial and independent inquiry, and inasmuch as the struggle has assumed an all-India importance and character, asks the public to give the Satyagrahis all the moral and material support within the power of the nation."

It will be noticed from this resolution that several M. L. C.'s had already resigned their seats on the Bombay Legislative Council as a protest against the Government's policy with regard to Bardoli. Mention has already been made in a previous chapter of the visit to Bardoli of Sjts. Dadubhai Desai, Bhimbhai Naik, Shivadasani and Dr. Dikshit. Rao Bahadur Bhimbhai Naik, who had been interesting himself in the matter ever since the publication of the Settlement Officer's proposals of enhancement in the assessment of the Bardoli taluka, had been keeping himself in touch with the Government all the while. At the instance of the Revenue Member he had seen Mr. Smart the Commissioner on the 5th of May, only to be told by him that individual cases would be considered after the revised assessment was paid up. Thereafter he opened correspondence with Government on behalf of other Gujarat members and

himself, and after several evasive and supercilious answers to his letters, they decided in a body to resign their seats. In their letter addressed to H. E. the Governor, Sjts. Dadubhai Desai and Jivabhai Patel (Members for Kheda), Jethalal Swaminarayan (Member for Ahmedabad), Vamanrao Mukadam (Member for Panch Mahal), Bhimbhai Naik (Member for Surat rural), H. B. Shivadasani (Member for Surat rural) and Dr. Dikshit (Member for Surat urban) observed, that "when a Government forgetful of its own obligations commits grave breaches of law, and ruthlessly attempts to trample under foot such noble and law-abiding people, it is but fair and proper for us, as a protest against the high-handed policy of Government in that taluka, to resign our seats on the Bombay Legislative Council, and so we request your Excellency to accept our resignations of the same." Sjts. Amritlal Sheth and Haribhai Amin followed suit a fews days later.

The Sardar, who was in Bombay for a day, had an occasion to meet the members of the Working Committee, many of whom would have run up to Bardoli if he had wished. Pandit Motilalji, who warmly greeted him, humorously asked Lala Girdharilal (who is doing insurance work) how long he would be prepared to insure Sjt. Vallabhbhai's freedom! Every one appeared to be sure, that in a few days the Sardar would be a guest in one of H. M.'s prisons, that Gandhiji would have to take his place and that Bardoli would become an all-India issue. But Sjt. Vallabhbhai did not even out of courtesy invite the various leaders to go to Bardoli. Their visit would if possible advertise Bardoli a little more, but it would soon give an opportunity to the opposite side to misrepresent the case.

Nevertheless Dr. Ansari, Maulana Shaukat Ali and Maulvi Mahomed Baloch, M. L. C., did decide to go to Bardoli, if only because there were a number of Musalman Satyagrahis there, and Musalman friends from Surat wanted them very much to go. Dr. Ansari, instead of going to Bardoli, devoted one whole day to Surat, talking to the Musalmans, and at a mammoth gathering declared that the Musalmans as a community were with the people of Bardoli in their fight for justice. Maulana Shaukat Ali and Maulvi Mahomed Baloch visited Bardoli and were delighted at the wonderful atmosphere of solidarity and unity in Bardoli.

Messrs. Bharucha and Nariman were attracted by the brave fight that Parsi khatedars had been putting up and they visited several villages, and by questions and cross-questions assured themselves that Bardoli would pass successfully through the ordeal that was in store for it. Mr. Nariman drew up a most severe indictment of the coercive methods at a meeting in Bardoli:

> "We are told, that British rule has established peace and order, and dacoits and Pindharas are no more. Whatever may be the case elsewhere, today in Bardoli the Pathan and the Bombay hooligan reign supreme. The Pathans, who have been imposed upon you, are drawn from the ruffians, whose movements are closely watched by the police in Bombay all the hours of the day. Government could not have disgraced themselves more than by hiring these Pathans."

Mr. Bharucha paid another visit with Mr. Suntoke, a senior vakil from Bombay, and both, on going to Bombay, addressed an appeal signed by prominent Parsis and addressed to their community, asking them

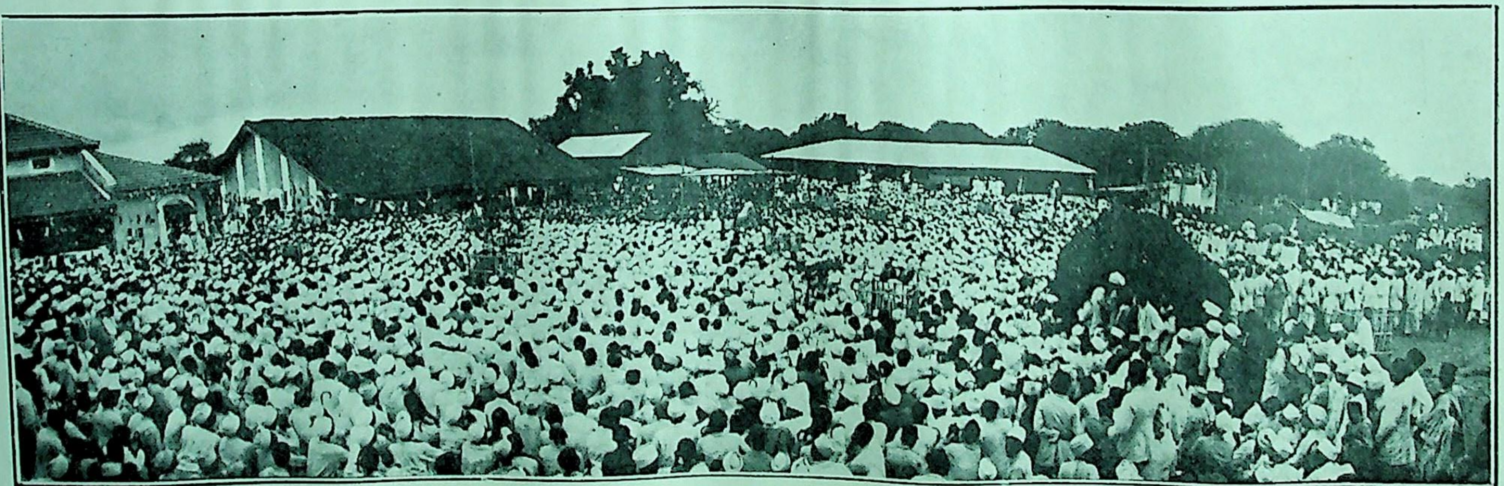


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A MEETING IN BARDOLI

p. 160

to have nothing to do, directly or indirectly, with the measures adopted by Government in Bardoli.

Misses Bhesania from Bombay, members of the Youth League, came to Bardoli to spend a few days in the villages, and the accounts they gave of the conditions they had seen sent a thrill of horror among the students and youths in Bombay. The awakening among them, which culminated later in big processions and splendid collections for the Satyagraha Fund, was entirely due to the preliminary expeditions of these pioneers.

Sjt. Jayaramdas Dolatram, M. L. C. from Sindh, who was requested to preside at the Surat District Conference, would not do so without seeing things with his own eyes. He visited several villages and drew in his speech a graphic picture of the things he had seen.

The Sikhs had been closely watching the struggle, and twice or thrice they had sent telegrams offering to send their volunteers, and the Sardar had every time thankfully to decline their offer. Sardar Mangalsingh now came on a visit to Bardoli and left immensely impressed. Dr. Satyapal was specially deputed by the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee to go to Bardoli to study the campaign. He spent several days, visiting villages, addressing meetings and congratulating the people on their heroic fight.

Sheth Jamnalal Bajaj was also proud to count himself among the pilgrims, and declared at several meetings that he had come to purify himself and to warm himself at the sacred flame.

Sjts. Joshi and Pataskar, M.L.C's from Maharashtra came to witness things from a detached viewpoint. They had never associated themselves with Gandhiji or with Satyagraha or non-co-operation, but they were interested in a movement which was purely

agrarian and wanted to see Satyagraha in actual operation. One of them on leaving Bardoli said to the Sardar, 'We came to scoff, but remained to pray.'

And what did all these friends see? What was it that kept them so spell-bound, what made them proclaim with one voice that the struggle was a unique one, a heroic and a sacred one? There were several things. For one thing they were amazed at the wonderful organisation of the taluka. While there had been a few backsliders,—possibly one per cent. of the khatedars,—there were numerous villages which stood like impregnable castles out of which not a brick or stone had been loosened. There was Isroli a village of which all the peasants had received notices of forfeiture in respect of all their lands, possibly because it was one of the four villages in the taluka where the assessment was not enhanced. Superficially looking they had no reason to withhold payment. But they all stood firm like a rock, no matter if all their buffaloes were attached and all their lands sold. There were three other villages—Kharad, Kuvadia and Chhitra—where too, under the later notification, the assessment had been restored to its original amount. All of them were tiny hamlets which were often surrounded by the Government officials intent on creating breaches by lies and misrepresentation. But not one of these flinched, simply because the Sardar had burnt the conviction indelibly on their understanding that they had joined the fight for the honour of the whole taluka and they must sink or swim with it. The feeling that all were jointly and severally responsible for the honour of the taluka was shared not only by the different units composing a village, but by all the different village units composing the taluka. Sarbhon and similar places, which

had joined the fray after much deliberation and calculation and at a late stage, were the most impregnable centres in the taluka.

Next was the imposing battle array organised by the Sardar. There were not only the omnipotent provisions of the Land Revenue Code to be grappled with, there was the 'universal host' armed with unlimited powers to administer those provisions according to their own light (or darkness?).

I need not introduce them to the reader. Suffice it to say that those pillars of Government contributed considerably to bring about the downfall of the Government. They were too petty, I should even say too innocuous, to merit Milton's terrible description:

"When night
Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons
Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine."

But the poor villagers who had never seen officials in decent positions perform the curious antics that they had been doing did think of them in that light. To checkmate these friends' movements and to frustrate their attempts, the Sardar had his lieutenants, trusted and true, some of them commanding not only his respect but reverence, and yet yielding to him an allegiance that was the surprise of all. There were Dr. Sumant Mehta and his good wife guarding the stronghold at Sarbhon, Dr. Chandulal and his party at Valod, Sjt. Mohanlal Pandya and Darbarsaheb dealing with the Deputy Collector, and Abbas Saheb Tyebji and Imam Saheb engaged in undoing the mischief of the Musalman Mamlatdar among his co-religionists.

And under these officers were privates ready to march anywhere and everywhere, at any hour of the night and day, and ready to do the lowliest of duties, from carrying a message to drawing water from the

well. There were about 250 of them distributed over 16 Satyagraha camps established in various parts of the taluka. They had to be ready day and night to carry out any orders that might be issued by their Chief. The round of duties of most of them began often as early as 3 A. M., when they started with their orders for the day to the various villages where they would distribute the daily news bulletins issued by the Publicity Bureau. Some of them had to post themselves at and keep a strict watch over the various approaches to the village, and no sooner was a *japti* party sighted or the whank of a car heard, than they were to be on their alert, and the warning of the fact to be given to the village people. Some of them had always like sleuth hounds to be on the trail of the Government officials. Their business was to scent their plans and warn the village people against their machinations. They had to keep the head office regularly informed of everything that happened in the village. All were to go amongst the peasants, acquaint themselves with their needs and difficulties, cheer them up and explain to them the instructions of the Chief. At night they returned with their report of the day's work to their respective centres and laid their tired limbs to rest, may be on a simple palm-leaf mat.

And at the head of them all the Sardar, ever on the move, without haste and without rest, ever vigilant, his iron discipline ever unrelaxed, paying the penalty of his exclusive prerogative — speech-making—often at midnight, and often at three or four places in a day. Some one comes and asks him, 'Supposing they deprive us of the licences of our cars, what could we do?' The Sardar laughs one of his loud laughs and says: 'We have not mortgaged our feet. We can walk miles as we used to do—25 miles a day when Gandhiji

was carrying on his recruiting campaign. And surely our cars will be useless in the monsoon. We will have to trudge through thorns and mire. But that will give us a jolly good time. You may be sure that none of the Government officials will try the experiment.' The peasants come to him with their complaints and doubts: "Why not barricade the roads, or place spikes on them to burst the tyres of the officials' cars to give a 'non-violent' shaking to some fellow who has made himself a veritable nightmare to the people?" He gently argues with them, explains to them the need for non-violence and the potency of mass organisation, and mass suffering. "Your fight," he tells them, "is not for a few lakhs of rupees, but for a principle. If you learn how to combine and resist a government, when it is unjust, in a peaceful manner, you will leave to your children a heritage that is worth crores of rupees. You are fighting for self-respect which ultimately leads to Swaraj. . . . You peasants are always oppressed, always trampled upon. You eat the bread of toil, your life is an unbroken tale of hardship and suffering. But your suffering is sterile because it is the result of ignorance. Why should you not do true penance by undergoing a tithe of that suffering intelligently and with a clear knowledge of its spiritual significance? If you do that, if you are pure, gods will throw incense on your sacrifice and rants and despots will cower before you."

What surprised the visitors even more was the awakening among women. Content to be pent up in their houses with their men, children and cattle, they left the houses and thronged the meetings when the Sardar came to their villages or to any village within their reach. Their simple, straight and unhesitating answers to questions that the visitors put to them showed the visitors the strength behind the movement.

The women of Varad were the most conspicuous of them all and present at almost every meeting in their division. They had their own songs, some of them being old songs of the saints and some composed by themselves to suit the fight in which they were engaged, and tacked on to the originals. One of these songs sung soulfully by them ran:

> "With full knowledge take up your arms even like a Gnani (seer). Let Purity and Contentment be your armour and Courage your shield. The valiant shall rush to the forefront, the laggards will be beaten and will take to their heels. With full knowledge, therefore, take up the fight like the Gnani.
>
> "The path of fight is not strewn with roses. It is sharp as the edge of the sword, for it is the fight for Truth. Let us therefore be wide awake like the Gnani. With full knowledge etc.
>
> "The tyrant has run amok and crushed the ryot under his heels. We slumbered so long, we have now found our Guru and are blessed with knowledge. With full knowledge etc.
>
> "He has taught us to pit righteousness and truth against oppression and injustice. God is sure to run to the rescue of right and vanquish the wrong. With full knowledge etc.
>
> "Vallabhbhai our leader assures us that ultimately 'victory is ours. Let us therefore keep our pledge. With full knowledge etc."

Last but not the least was the way in which the teaching was carried out. To take just one instance here. One of the *japti* officers ordered his men to lay siege to a village. Apparently it was a single house, but really it was one whole street that was besieged, as the armed policemen posted in front of the house

with a Circle Inspector and the two Pathans who guarded the back door were ready to pounce upon any door that opened within their beat. These men were posted there at 2-30 A. M. and were there until 6 P. M. when we visited the place. The house belonged to an old Government pensioner aged about 75. He had not even signed the Satyagraha pledge, but the officer thought that the best way to coerce the pensioner was to put his house under siege. The old man's wife was sitting at a window on the storey of the house, rosary in hand, and repeating *Ramanama*. 'I hope, old mother, you are not afraid,' asked the Sardar from outside her house.

'Why should I be afraid, when you are there to protect us?' she replied.

'Not I, but Rama,' said the Sardar correcting her.

'Indeed Ramji is merciful,' she said nodding assent.

'But how do you like these Pathans and policemen at your doors?' asked one of us.

'They are quite welcome. But for them the Sardar would not have graced my house.'

Not an ill word, nor one of anger, though the old woman had not been able to go out of her house for those fifteen hours.

A people, who were 'but in the gristle' only the other day, had suddenly 'hardened into the bone of manhood,' to use Burke's picturesque phrase. Theirs was not meek submission to brute strength, but puissant non-violence in answer to savagery. It is this which excited the wonder and admiration of all.

CHAPTER XX

NOT A MIRACLE

"Forge our strength link by link till we put on the armour of invincibility."

— *Terence MacSwiney*

THE Bardoli victory was not won by a miracle. It was the inevitable fruit of patient and incessant toil, the inevitable result of the teaching that the Sardar wore himself out to impart day in and day out. During the first two months he gave three days in the week to Bardoli, but as soon as the Ahmedabad Municipality released him, all his waking hours were given to the people of Bardoli, the day usually beginning at 5 P. M. and ending at 2 A. M., with four or five speeches a day on an average. I have noticed in a previous chapter one of the secrets of the success of the Sardar, *viz.*, his apotheosis of the peasant. Another secret was the wonderful patience with which the Sardar inculcated upon the people his teachings one after another.

The first thing that he taught the peasants was, as we have already seen, the lesson of fearlessness. Above all else was the lingering fear of the sarkar. 'What is this fear of this 'will-o'-the-wisp'?' he said to them in so many of his early speeches. 'What is

this Government? Has any one seen it? I have never seen it. Does Government mean the Mamlatdar, or the Talati, or the Patel, or is it a combination of these all? There is no individual called the sarkar. Why then should we magnify individuals and make sarkars of them?' Here is his definition of an '*amaldar*' (official): 'He who stands by the side of the ryot in the hour of his need is an *amaldar*, all the rest are *hawaldars* (petty peons).'

The second teaching was that of unity. The two sections of apparently conflicting interests were those who tilled the land and those who let it out. The latter had great stakes, and unless they stood by the petty tenants, the struggle would fizzle out. Fortunately for the taluka, the bulk of its population were small but cultivating landlords, and those who let out their lands were few and far between. Nevertheless the Sardar's preliminary excursions were all directed to the strongholds of these non-cultivating landlords—Valod, Vankaner, Bardoli. 'The sole ground on which the assessment has been enhanced is the rise in the rental value of land, and whether that rise is real or unreal, you are responsible for it,' he would say to them. 'It is for your sins that the whole taluka is suffering, and the least penance that you owe to them is to stand by them. Will you be loyal to the sarkar or to the tillers of the soil? What is it that binds you to the sarkar? Payment of taxation. But what binds you to the peasants is a living bond. It is their toil on which you live and carry on your trade. If they are ruined, where will you be? Do not be false to your mainstay.' At another place he said, using a queer simile, 'The Savkar is merged in the tenant like water in milk. It is not possible to separate them. And you know what happens when the milk is on the

boil? The water rushes to the bottom to save the milk, burns itself and pushes the milk to the surface. The milk on the other hand boils over to extinguish the fire and save the water. That is how I expect you to stand by one another.'

The bond of unity between the cultivating peasants themselves was the Satyagraha pledge. The first month was entirely devoted to taking signatures on the pledge, and the reports from different camps gave minute details about every village: the number of covenanters, shirkers and whimperers, and the Sardar had to fix his programme according to the information received each day. It is here that the weapon of social boycott and excommunication came into full play. It is this weapon that exasperated the Government, but they were helpless because social boycott was no offence under the Penal Code. And the Sardar poured ridicule on Government for grudging the people the use of this their only weapon. 'What do you do yourselves? Yours is a close corporation maintained by force of arms and its motive is no nobler than keeping a nation in bondage. We resort to this weapon simply for the sake of self-defence and self-preservation.' But he never omitted to emphasize its limitations, the very first being that in no circumstances should a Satyagrahi refuse to minister to the physical needs of the party boycotted. 'Eschew by all means molestation or oppression. We may not refuse any one milk, water, foodstuffs, help in case of illness or worse. We cannot afford to prosecute boycott at the expense of our humanity.'

But a most vigorous boycott was advised as against those from outside the taluka who came forward to purchase forfeited lands, the main item in the boycott being a refusal to cultivate their lands.

Refusal of service it certainly was, but boycott of outsiders would otherwise have had no meaning, and the only effective way to keep them from their vicious designs was to convince them that they might have lands just for the fun of it, but not to cultivate.

As against men in the taluka belonging to small communities like the Parsis the Sardar always insisted on a relaxation of the boycott. On hearing that a Parsi in Manekpur was being molested in various ways, he rushed to the spot and called an informal meeting to which he invited the Parsi. The Parsi friend confessed that the complaint about refusal of medical aid was false, but that intending customers were enticed away from his liquorshop, that he was refused the services of a barber, and that he could get no agricultural labour. This is what the Sardar said to the people: 'Of course you cannot compel any one to go to his liquorshop, but it would be wrong if you asked any one to prefer some other shop to his shop. The services of the barber should not be refused, and even agricultural labour. He is penitent and he asks for help, you may not refuse it.'

When the attachment operations began, minute instructions were issued to meet every situation. In the beginning only those who had received notices were to greet the attachment parties with closed doors. Then whole villages were turned into blackholes, and people who could not put up with the terrible strain involved were humourously asked to undertake a pilgrimage. When it was found that in spite of the greatest precautions, the Pathans managed to carry away carts, break into enclosures and unhinge closed doors, the Sardar said: 'Pull your carts to pieces. Keep the body in one place, wheels in another, and shafts in a third place; make your hedges extra strong

with thorns and bushes; and fortify the doors in such a way that they might not be able to open them except by breaking them open with axes. Exhaust them thoroughly.'

When there were talks of forfeiture notices, he inculcated the philosophy of non-possession. 'How much land does a man require? Six feet at the most, and Hindus not even that. They require that much only or a couple of hours and then make room for others.' When the land was declared forfeited, he said: 'Surely they cannot carry the lands away to England, the police and the military cannot cultivate the lands. What will they do with the lands?' And when he saw that the men were completely organised, that there was no possibility of any one creating a breach, he asked the people to begin the sowing operations, never minding the forfeiture notices, and challenged Government to dispossess the peasants of even an inch of land.

Throughout the campaign, as we have seen, the greatest emphasis was laid on peace. Ever since the Collector raised the bogey of 'fire and violence,' the Sardar missed no opportunity to drive home the lesson of peace. "Never for a moment think that violence would be of any avail in this movement," he said in one of his speeches. "No power on earth can beat the British Government in armed force, and they can, if they are so minded, wipe out the whole taluka. Do not raise your little finger even in the face of the greatest provocation. In spite of the right of self-defence, which I hold sacred, I say: even if you are abused and belaboured, do not hit back. For the slightest shadow of a pretext is sure to be abused by Government, and all the good that we have achieved will be nullified."

Above all, the Sardar knew that the most important part of the campaign was to "reconnoitre the most important battlefield, to discover the dispositions of the enemy, to measure our own resources and forge our strength link by link till we put on the armour of invincibility."

CHAPTER XXI

THE COMBAT DEEPENS

"Threatening what his weak arm could never execute."

—*King Lear*

WHILE Bardoli was forging ahead, more and more conscious of its strength every day, Government was getting exasperated. Mr. Smart, who had not yet taken the trouble of visiting Bardoli, was still building on the assurances of his men on the spot that the movement would be ultimately crushed, it was only a question of time. Men at the helm implicitly trusted Mr. Smart who to them was their man on the spot, and opinion was freely expressed in Government circles that the movement would fizzle out at the end of May. When however they saw that their predictions were not justified, they had a war conference to devise more effective measures.

We are told that Divan Bahadur Harilal Desai, who was most anxious to bring about a settlement, made definite proposals and was successful to the extent that Government had promised to consider his proposals. We have no doubt about his anxiety as his letters to Sjt. Vallabhbhai amply show, but with the best will in the world to serve one's friend, one may end in doing a positive disservice to him if the methods of work and service employed by both are

widely divergent. And that is what happened in the present case. The Divan Bahadur started with the initial blunder of bolstering up Mr. Smart and his company's stipulation for the *first* payment of assessment—a stipulation, which, as we shall see later, was regarded as unreasonable and absurd by all except Government. It is he again who started talking of that as the minimum condition, and thus compelled Sjt. Vallabhbhai to reiterate his minimum conditions. Here is the Divan Bahadur's first letter, marked strictly personal and confidential, which Sjt. Vallabhbhai has with a very painful sense of duty permitted me to publish, in view of some of his own letters having been published with a view to give a distorted version of the case:

"Mahabaleshwar
Valley View, 25-5-'28

"MY DEAR VALLAVBHAI,

"I have played my card and it seems to have had its effect. You may have to hold yourself in readiness to be here if you receive my wire on Monday.

"Will people pay under protest if Government are prevailed upon to declare that an independent officer will be appointed to inquire into the settlement if people *first* pay up? This may be the minimum condition. I am trying to see that lands sold or forfeited be restored. Will try, but if you agree, wire yes, and reply post also. Don't be too exacting.

"I am with you though here.

With regards,
Yours sincerely,
HARILAL DESAI"

(Italics as in the original)

It may not perhaps be strictly true to say, that the Dewan Bahadur bolstered up the Government's demand for the minimum condition, for in several subsequent letters he takes up the position as if it were his own and tries to justify it as absolutely fair and reasonable. That makes the case worse for him, inasmuch as it implies that the original suggestion came from him, and Government were fortified in their irrational position by the opinion of one who was a friend of Sjt. Vallabhbhai. Whatever may be the case, there was no alternative for Sjt. Vallabhbhai but to reject the palpably unreasonable and humiliating offer. He therefore sent in reply to his letter the following telegram :

"Received letter. Impossible to pay enhanced portion before inquiry. Original assessment can be paid if independent open inquiry, with right to lead evidence, cross-question crown witnesses, granted, forfeited lands restored, Satyagrahi prisoners discharged. People will accept decision arbitration court. Wire reply Bardoli—Vallabhbhai."

He followed up the telegram with a letter which I reproduce in full:

"Bardoli, 28th May, 1928

"MY DEAR HARILAL,

"A full wire was sent to you from Navsari. I enclose copy which speaks for itself.

"As probably our methods of work and service clash, what may be a satisfactory minimum to me may be an exorbitant demand in your estimation. What can be the use of any inquiry if the enhancement is to be paid up? Government have ample security for its collection if in the event of a

decision unfavourable to the people the enhanced rate is not quickly paid up by them.

"Please note that the terms of reference will also have to be agreed upon. Any reference will not do.

"It must be a point of honour for any self-respecting agent of the people to insist upon the release of prisoners and lands, especially when they are illegally punished and forfeited.

"Lastly you would best serve the cause by refraining from any action, if you cannot act strongly and do not feel the strength of the people as I do. Whilst I want to shut no door to an honourable settlement, I am in no hurry to close the struggle without honourable settlement or putting the people to the severest test they are capable of facing. I would have a glorious defeat rather than an ignominious compromise.

"Now you will perhaps understand that I am not anxious to run to Mahabaleshwar or Poona. You will please therefore not send for me unless you think my presence indispensable.

Yours sincerely,
VALLABHBHAI"

We do not know if this letter was placed before Government, but the attempt at settlement died still-born, as it deserved. With Mr. Hatch known as 'the strong man' as Revenue Member, and Messrs. Smyth as Revenue Secretary, Smart as Revenue Commissioner and Anderson as Settlement Commissioner, the Government could not at this stage be prepared to reconsider their position. So they came out with a peal of thunder. On the 31st of May Government issued an "announcement to the occupants of land in the Bardoli taluka and Valod Mahal," in which they

had no mention to make of the threats of fire or violence,—much less of any actual instances of violence,—but they complained of "organised evasion, the locking up of houses and threats to the village Patels and *vethias* of boycott and excommunication," which rendered their attempts at distraint futile. They, therefore, we are told, "reluctantly resorted to the forfeiture of land and organised attachment of buffaloes and moveable property," and obtained the assistance of Pathans about whom "Government are satisfied that their conduct has been exemplary in every respect." The agriculturists are next reminded of the warning already given to them, that "their lands would be entered as Government unoccupied waste, . . . and that such lands once disposed of would never be returned to them;" they are informed that "up to date 1,400 acres of such land have been disposed of, and about 5,000 acres more will be disposed of in due course," that "applicants, Hindus, Mahomedans and Parsis, many of whom reside in Surat district, are forthcoming for all this land," that "up to the present one lakh of rupees have been recovered by Government towards the realisation of the total revenue of the taluka and the mahal," and that "many persons are anxious to pay" but for "excommunication, social boycott and fines," and Government therefore announce that the Collector would exempt from payment of one-fourth fine those who pay their land revenue on or before June 19th.

This notification, with all its *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*, and with its reiteration of threats, was regarded by the people as nothing but a further exhibition of bankruptcy. The penalty notices had failed, the distraint processes had failed, the forfeiture notices and attachment of buffaloes

had failed. And the notification, declaring that some land had been already sold and more would be sold, only confirmed them in their faith that the Government would not dare to dispossess the ryot of even an inch of ground. As for Sjt. Vallabhbhai, the announcement drew out the fighting man in him. The ease with which he exposed the absurdity of the Government figures puts one in mind of an episode in the life of Lloyd George. During the Boer War, the Intelligence Department under Lord Kitchener issued *weekly* bulletins announcing the capture of say 1,200 Boers and 2,000 rifles. In May, says Mr. Frank Harris, Lloyd George asked the War Office how many Boers were supposed to be in the field. The answer was between 15,000 and 20,000. In October Lloyd George quietly brought before the House a motion that peace be declared, inasmuch as by the simple rule of three it was evident that Lord Kitchener was fighting a minus number of imaginary enemies at the actual cost of a couple of millions sterling every week. For according to the gallant soldier's own reports of weekly capture he must have captured more than 30,000 Boers between May and October! The effect was extraordinary. The Government in their announcement had stated that they had sold 1,400 acres and were about to sell 5,000 more, and that a hundred thousand rupees had been recovered. "Now," said Sjt. Vallabhbhai, "I want Government to disclose the amounts for which these lands have been sold. According to their own Settlement Commissioner the value of land stood at 123 times the assessment. They have therefore either recovered many times the amount of their arrears, or sold the land away for paltry amounts. In the first case nothing is due to Government, in the second case they

must fix the assessment on the basis of the prices that they have actually realised.'' The irony completely exploded Government's pretensions. The statement about the Pathans provoked the Sardar to have another ironical fling at Government. "I admit," he said, "that the conduct of the Pathans is exemplary in every respect, for Government have no worthier example to follow than that of the Pathans."

As regards the purchasers of lands, the Sardar challenged Government to state if they had found a single genuine cultivator from Gujarat to purchase the lands, and addressing the three or four sycophants who, he had heard, had purchased the lands, he said: "Let me warn them that they will find it hard meat to digest. The so-called Parsi purchasers should understand, that they would have to riddle with bullets the bodies of their own Parsi sisters and brothers and manure their fields with their bones before they could plough a single furrow in the land. The Musalmans and Hindus, if there are any, must reckon with the same fate." He invited Government to execute their threats rather than make a ridiculous display of force, and asked the peasants to be prepared for further suffering. "What is the use of this ridiculous display of force, this persecution and harassment to which the peasants are being subjected?" he asked. "It is not going to break them. Let them bring in the military and put end to it all at a stroke. We are bled white to pay for it, let us at least have a glimpse of our 'fine' army. Our peasants have never had a glimpse of a gun in their life. Let them hear the roar of the cannon and the music of the musketry for once at least. On the day our peasants hear the bullets whistle about their ears, they will enter into man's estate and their stock will improve."

In another speech he maintained the people's right to use peaceful weapons like social boycott and excommunication which, he said, were certainly more legitimate than the crooked ways employed by Government to break the resolve of the *Satyagrahis*. The 'exemplary conduct' of the Pathans was exposed by the Satyagraha Publicity Bureau by publishing statements on oath made by women or girls whose modesty they had insulted, and the Sardar in numerous speeches made the Government's statements about the Pathans' conduct and about people forthcoming to purchase forfeited lands the targets of his stinging satire.

As for the lands which had been declared to be sold, he arranged for Miss Mithubehn Petit, Mrs. Bhaktilakshmi Desai, Darbar Gopaldas' wife, and his own daughter Manibehn to be camped on those very lands, and instructed them to fix up their huts and settle there.

The public answered the Government's threats in a variety of ways. If anything was lacking to make the Bardoli question one of all-India importance, the notification supplied it. The newspapers all over the country took up the question as one of great national importance, and their pages were full from day to day of news from Bardoli and accounts of meetings held in all parts of the country to sympathise with the heroic struggle. It is at this stage that the Hon. Mr. V. J. Patel, President of the Legislative Assembly, who as a Gujarati and a member of the Legislative Assembly representing Gujarat had naturally been closely following the struggle, felt it his duty to translate his interest and his sympathy into concrete shape. He placed the facts in his possession before His Excellency the Viceroy, informed His Excellency

of the step he was proposing to take if there was no improvement in the situation, and as soon as he saw the Government announcement, addressed a letter to Gandhiji sympathising with the heroic struggle and offering a contribution of Rs. 1,000 per month towards the fund for which Gandhiji had issued an appeal to the country. The letter constitutes a most momentous event in the history of the struggle, and will forever remain a document of first class historical importance. The active expression of sympathy by one in the position of the Speaker with a movement which they thought was of an essentially political nature and intended to defy the authority of Government was subjected to severe strictures by a handful of critics. But the country at large hailed the letter with a chorus of applause, and appealed to men in lesser positions to follow the noble example. Here is the principal portion of the letter:

> "My study of the struggle has convinced me that the Bardoli people have a just case for asking for an independent and impartial inquiry. I am also convinced that they have exhausted all other constitutional methods open to them for the redress of their grievances. I have also watched with equal pain and indignation some of the coercive measures that have been adopted by Government to collect the assessment which is the bone of contention between Government and the people of that taluka. I believe that the measures adopted have crossed in several instances the bounds of law, order and decency, and the arrogant letter of the Commissioner, N. D., has painfully aggravated the situation.
>
> "In these circumstances I feel that I cannot remain silent and inactive. I am sorry that I

cannot at the present moment express my deep sympathy with the people of the taluka and my strong disapproval of the coercive measures and of the letter of the Commissioner N. D. more tangibly than by sending the accompanying small contribution of Rs. 1,000 towards the fund which is now being raised on their behalf. I propose to continue to send the same amount from month to month so long as the struggle lasts. I wish to give you this further assurance that at the very first opportunity I shall place myself in communication with those who have called me to the high office, which I have the honour to occupy and which I regard as simply a trust on their behalf, and if I find that I can take any other more effective step to help the sufferers of Bardoli, you will not find me lagging behind."

The voice of the Speaker, who, in Gandhiji's words, had "broken through that unhealthy and slavish tradition" (*viz.*, of withholding sympathy from people when they were engaged in any fight with the Government), acted as a clarion call to all concerned. He had been able to do so, because he had "accepted his office not for its honour, not for the salary it brings him, but as he has put it in his letter, as a trust on behalf of those who have elected him to the office." There were others too similarly placed, and the way in which he had acted made them feel uncomfortable in their offices. But he could not help it. The resignations of their seats on the Legislative Council by Messrs. Nariman and Balubhai Desai (members for Bombay Urban), and Narandas Bechar (member for Karachi) on the 5th June, and by Jayaramdas Dolatram (Hyderabad) on the 8th June and others that followed may be said to be the result, direct or indirect, of the Speaker's

worthy move. It prompted other public men too to do their duty in the matter, as we shall see in a later chapter.

But the way in which men lesser in status than these public men awoke to their sense of duty was a sight for the gods to see. "The suffering to which the people of Bardoli are being wantonly subjected," observed Gandhiji in an issue of *Young India*, "is raising them since they had prepared themselves for it. The brave stand by the simple peasants has undermined the very prestige to prop up which the Government are making frantic efforts. More purifying than this suffering imposed by godless and insolent authority is the suffering which the people are imposing upon themselves." He was referring to the resignations of their offices by sixty three Patels and eleven Talatis in the taluka. It is hardly possible for a stranger to realise the immensity of this sacrifice. Let it be remembered, that even in 1921 when the atmosphere was full of sacrifice and heroic action, may be because of the belief in the coming of the millenium within a short period, no Talati had come forward with his resignation. That these people, for whom it was much more difficult to give up their positions than for big Government officers, decided to resign positions they had held for over 20 and 25 years, shows the measure and the purity of the people's suffering which had evoked the sacrifice.

The public awakening outside the taluka was immense. Conference were held in different districts of Gujarat, and men 'from outside' were purposely invited to preside over their deliberations. Sjt. Jayaramdas, M. L. C. from Sindh, had already presided over the Conference at Surat; at Kheda Sjt. Khadilkar, Editor of a Bombay daily, at Broach Sjt. Nariman, M. L. C. from

Bombay, and at Ahmedabad Sjt. Kelkar, M. L. A. presided at conferences held during the month. Vallabhbhai was invited to address every one of these. He remorselessly exposed the lawlessness of Government methods, and declared, that if justice was not done betimes, the agitation might spread over the whole of Gujarat. The attendance was unprecedentedly large, and thousands of rupees were collected at every one of these conferences.

The suggestion thrown out by Mr. Jayaramdas at the Surat Conference that the 12th of June should be celebrated throughout the country as the Bardoli Day was backed by Gandhiji and the President of the Congress, and there was hardly a city or town of note in India, and hardly a village of note in Gujarat, but celebrated the day with *hartals* and processions and collections and meetings. Lala Lajpatrai, of revered memory, who had been watching the struggle with deep interest, sent on the Bardoli day a telegraphic remittance of Rs. 2,000, 500 from himself and Rs. 1,500 from friends, and regretted in a telegram that he should not be given a chance to offer his services and that the movement should have to be confined to Bardoli.

The awakening among the youth in Bombay was immense. They went from door to door making collections, and organised early in July a Bardoli Day of their own, led a successful procession in pouring rain, money pouring in the Sardar's car as it threaded its way through the crowds. Various purses amounting to over Rs. 24,000 were presented to the Sardar at the meeting in the Empire theatre, where the youth honoured the beloved leader and received with applause his call to go and have their first lessons in public service in the Bardoli University.

The Satyagraha Fund met with a response almost unique in the history of the nation. Cheques and money orders were received every day at Bardoli, at Satyagraha Ashram and at the *Navajivan* and *Young India* offices. The contributions came not only from all the provinces, but from the most distant parts of the land, not only from distant lands like France, Belgium, Japan and China, but from the most remote corners of the globe including New Zealand, Malay States and Fiji.

The Labour Union of Ahmedabad called upon its members to pay at least one anna each, and the response was so spontaneous that towards the middle of July their contribution exceeded Rs. 1,300. Boys and girls in Gurukuls and other educational institutions fasted, curtailed their rations or denied themselves milk, ghi and sugar, engaged themselves in manual work, and sent the savings or the earnings as their contributions to the fund. Women had their special meetings. Musalman women who never took part in such movements sent in their collections, Brahman women sent in theirs, and women in other parts of Gujarat also organised collections.

Bombay had several meetings addressed by that expert national beggar Manilal Kothari who levied his tribute of handsome amounts from barristers and advocates some of whom had never contributed towards a movement of this kind. Anything was acceptable to him. 'If you cannot give a handsome cheque, you can give your car,' he would say in his seductive way, and thanks to his efforts, the workers in Bardoli had timely use of no less than four cars to help their whirlwind campaign. The total amount which just exceeded Rs. 10,000 in May when the appeal was made, exceeded Rs. 2,00,000 at the end of June and Rs. 3,00,000 in the middle of July.

And well might the tide of popular enthusiasm rise higher and higher, for the tide of farces and frightfulness was also rising every day. The number of forfeiture notices exceeded 5,000 at the end of June. But the Government had not much faith left in the efficacy of these notices. So they tried methods in which they had more faith. Lands, worth Rs 50,000 and subject to an assessment of Rs. 1,200 standing in the name of Ismail Gaba, a Bardoli musalman Satyagrahi, were declared to be sold. Over and above this additional land worth Rs. 25,000 was advertised to be auctioned. All this was intended to break the spirit of the leading Musalman in Bardoli and thereby to demoralise the rest of the small number of Musalmans who were still standing to their guns. But it was futile.

The persecution of the Parsi liquor vendor of Valod proved equally futile. Mention has already been made of the various ways in which Sheth Dorabji was sought to be subdued. Not satisfied with selling his Rs. 2,000 worth of liquor for a song, not content with serving him with a notice of forfeiture of Rs. 30,000 worth of land, the Revenue authorities got the Excise authorities to help them in bending this 'obdurate' Parsi. He was served with notices to show cause why he should not be proceeded against for keeping his shop closed since the 25th of April. Nothing daunted, he replied to the Superintendent of Excise, saying that he had not the wherewithal to run his shop, and that rather than he show cause, Government ought to show cause why they should not be proceeded against for thus persecuting him.

The Resident Magistrate at Bardoli on the other hand was dealing out justice in the same manner. In the beginning of June three volunteers were arrested under the Police Act in circumstances which were

absolutely ridiculous. It happened that the Collector had come to Bardoli that day, and he was annoyed to find a volunteer seated, not in the compound of the Government bungalow, not even within yards of the bungalow, but on the public road opposite the gate leading to the bungalow, and a few yards from the gate. The volunteer was there in discharge of his duty to keep watch on the officials' movements, and when a policeman asked him to leave the place, he asked him to produce a written order. The policeman went and informed the Collector who had the youngster produced before him and delivered to the Sub-Inspector for proper action. He was dismissed with a warning. In the meanwhile Dinkarrai, a student from the Gujarat Vidyapith, had taken his post, and Prabhubhai, another volunteer was standing there for instructions. Both of these were arrested. The first one, Chhaganlal, who had been dismissed with a warning, now took their place and he too was arrested. The particular section of the Police Act contemplates action against ruffians and suspects loitering near public places to cause mischief and worse. But these young lads, brimming over with the enthusiasm of youth and service and full of courage to look a Collector in the face, could not be tolerated by that functionary, and they had to go the way of the ruffians and suspects. Their trial was more ludicrous. The Magistrate held court at night. The Sub-Inspector, not accustomed to appear in court at such an hour, had to yield to the exigency and he hunted out some witnesses with some difficulty. One of these was so badly stinking of liquor that it was a trial to sit within a few feet of him. What his evidence was one might easily imagine. All that the magistrate had to say against these boys was: "These accused were found

loitering near the Collector's bungalow at Bardoli where the Collector is camping and were found to be obstructing persons going there on business"—there being no attempt to indicate the nature of the obstruction, or to examine the men obstructed including the Collector who was annoyed. The boys were fined Rs. 50 each or in default to undergo simple imprisonment for two months. They naturally preferred the latter course. The next day there were a number of boys to take up the imprisoned volunteers' duties, but no proceedings were taken against them.

The very next day was the judgment in the Vankaner case in which some of the most respectable peasants of Vankaner, a student from the Vidyapith and some volunteers had been tried for rioting and obstruction and for using criminal force. The substance of the charge was that the accused numbering 19 had waylaid three carts carrying the Deputy Collector's kit and prevented the cartmen from proceeding further. The chief witness was one who had a dark dimly burning lantern with which he claimed to have seen the accused on the darkest night in the month. The evidence was so flimsy, or rather was so utterly lacking, that five had to be discharged for want of identification, and three had to be acquitted. The rest were all sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment on each of the two counts of rioting and obstruction, and one month's simple for using criminal force, the sentences to run concurrently.

As though these farcical trials and vindictive sentences were not enough, a savage display of frightfulness was made in taking these convicts to the prison. All including the three lads sentenced to two months' *simple* imprisonment were taken to the Bardoli station handcuffed in pairs and roped in pairs!

But the people had by now become adepts in laughing at these displays. The convicts were laughing and joking and saying to people who were annoyed to see them handcuffed: 'Never mind: something better than wrist watches.' Immediately the people caught their spirit, lustily cried *Vande Mataram* and gave hearty cheers as the train carrying the convicts steamed out of the platform.

And the lesson of laughing away the agony of these persecutions was being inculcated by the Sardar day in and day out, and the bulletins publishing the daily news were masterpieces of caustic wit and humour. At a place where the Sardar had been speaking quite passionately for an hour, a man came and said: "Patel so and so was compelled to give tea to the Mamlatdar and his people." "How was that?" Sjt. Vallabhbhai asked. The old Patel came forward and said: "They came near by my window and entreated me to open the door. I could not trust them, I said. They assured me again and again that they would attach nothing, all they wanted was a cup of tea! And so I opened the door, gave them tea and dismissed them." As soon as this man had finished the story, another peasant rushed forward and said: "No, Vallabhbhai Saheb, we should not permit this. He gave them tea not because of the assurance but because he was afraid of the Mamlatdar, and all that we have to learn is to cast off fear." Vallabhbhai laughed heartily and effected a comprise in this wise: "Well, if they entreat you to give tea, you cannot refuse a trifle like that. But remember that these are dangerous fellows. Supposing there happens to be something in your milk,—a fly or an insect,—and you unwittingly serve them tea with that milk, and God forbid, if there should be some mishap,

you know what would happen? You would be held responsible. So the less you have to do with these officials, the better." There was merry laughter, and in a moment every one had forgotten the incident. The air was thick with rumours of arrest of the Sardar and some of his comrades. Some one in the meeting asked him if he would be arrested. He replied, "Why should I be arrested. There is hardly any chance. The poor buffalo fetches at least a few rupees. I would fetch nothing if I was attached and sold!"

Others were slowly imbibing the lesson of suffering and getting ready for the greater trial that they knew was ahead. I happened to meet a villager immediately after the Government communique was issued. It was a treat to have a talk with him. "You must have heard of he latest communique?" I asked.

"Yes; it only means that the struggle will be more bitter than it has hitherto been."

"How long can you hold out?"

"Indefinitely. My village is completely organised. There is not a single buffalo left in my village. In course of time we will see that Government will have nothing on which they can lay their hands. Ever since the struggle became acute I have discarded all my brass vessels. We cook in earthen vessels, we eat in earthen plates. Let them attach them if they like. We sleep outside on mats, not on beds which too are now-a-days being attached. And now I have another plan. Why should we be pent up in our houses? We think of converting a house into a *dharmashala*. A man who has no lands will keep the *dharmashala* for the benefit of the people, and will even start a common mess if necessary."

"But supposing you were asked by Sjt. Vallabhbhai to leave your hearths and homes?"

"Most gladly. We have sent our children to our relatives, some of the women have gone with the buffaloes, in fact many of us come to the village simply to sleep there."

"The movement," he added, "has come as a godsend. Most of us could not do without tea. The buffaloes having gone, no milk is available, and so many of us have had compulsorily to give up the tea habit. There are some still, who manage with goat's milk and one or two have got cows, but a spirit of self-restraint and self-denial is coming over us. And what if we lose this battle? The next we will fight with more caution and more resourcefulness. The lessons of this will not have gone in vain."

It is this faith in their ultimate success and in the methods with they were pursuing that kept them on, and in defiance of all Government notifications and notices of forfeiture they proceeded to cultivate the lands and begin the sowing operations. It is this thing perhaps that was interpreted as a campaign of civil disobedience, for the Memorandum, prepared by the Bombay Government for submission to the Indian Statutory Commission, describes the Bardoli Satya-*graha* in full detail and closes with this statement: "*It is believed that* the question of launching a civil disobedience campaign by way of trespassing on and tilling lands forfeited by Government is receiving the attention of the agitators." The resignations of the Patels and Talatis naturally gave the movement a somewhat different shape from the one it was intended to take, and the memorandum drafted somewhere about this time deplores the fact, that "the question has now developed into an experiment in non-cooperation and the paralysis of Government in a selected area through mass civil disobedience."

CHAPTER XXII

ACCUSED JUDGING

"Qui s'excuse s'accuse"

IN the days of the Kheda Satyagraha there was no publicity on behalf of Government. But during the Borsad Satyagraha the Director of Information appeared on the scene, towards the close of the struggle, with a defence of Government extending over six columns of the *Bombay Chronicle*. It received a fitting reply and within a few days Sir Leslie Wilson remitted the whole of the punitive impost of Rs. 2 lakhs and 40 thousand. Now, after five months of the severest indictment by the Satyagraha Publicty Office of the Government policy and methods in Bardoli, the Government chose to set their Information Bureau in motion. The Collector of the district indeed issued leaflets once or twice, but his *shubha vachans* (gospels!), as he called them, had no effect except to amuse by the choice phraseology in which they were couched: "These prophets born to make others miserable are talking of war and bloodshed and firing and bones for manure." But the Director of Information now entered on an elaborate defence of Government policy and Government methods, and tried to controvert some of the

facts and figures I gave in my article on the 'Bardoli Case.' I shall not reproduce here his defence of Messrs. Jayakar and Anderson. The whole Government contention has been discussed threadbare in the earlier chapters of this book. I shall cite just two instances of the Director's attempts to throw dust in the eyes of the public. The first was the attempt to defend Mr. Anderson's figure of the leased area in Bardoli. "Mr. Anderson," said the Director in his communique, "stands by that statement and maintains that it was and is even short of the truth." It is no use expatiating on the absurdity of that statement, now that the Broomfield Committee has exploded the myth. Then about the rental theory. "The Indian Taxation Enquiry Committee," said the Director, "has gone carefully into this point, and they conclude, as the Bombay Government has also concluded, and as a very solid and substantial minority of the Bombay Land Revenue Assessment Committee also concluded, that the rental value basis is the only just and sound basis." Contrast this with the actual statement in the Taxation Enquiry Committee's report: "What the Committee would recommend is, that for the future the basis of the settlement should be the annual value, *by which term they mean the gross value, less cost of production, including the value of the labour actually expended by the farmer and his family on the holding and the return for enterprise.*" The Director of Information thus distorted the opinion of the Committee, and deliberately omitted to make mention of the fact, that in the Commitee's opinion the rate of assessment should be standardised at a comparatively low figure "not exceeding 25 per cent. of the 'annual value.'" Moreover while he cited the conclusion of a *minority* of the Land Revenue Committee, he was

studiously silent about the conclusion of the majority which rejected the rental basis and recommended the maximum assessment to be fixed at 25 per cent. of the 'profits of agriculture.'

In another communique the Director of Information stated that the resignations of Patels and Talatis were tendered under coercion and duress. The Patels and Talatis in a body nailed the lie to the counter in a statement to the press, and one of the Talatis exposed the Deputy Collector who had "persuaded him very much to withdraw his resignation," and also tempted him with a promise of transfer on increased salary.

In another communique — there was quite a sheaf of them — devoted especially to the 'exemplary' Pathans, the Director set forth denials of certian statements in the language of a judge, as if he had both the complainant and the accused present before him. When it was alleged that a Pathan was caught in the act of theft, the Director came to the pontifical conclusion, that "the police have found the case to be one fit to be classed as untrue." When it was alleged, that a Pathan threatened a Satyagrahi with his knife, it was not denied that the Pathan had threatened him, but that he had threatened to stab him! In these elaborate refutations of the indecent behaviour of the Pathans, the fact of the nudity of the Pathans was not denied, only their indecent intention was denied! And the Director chose to be conveniently silent about the brutal beating of a buffalo to death.

Enough however of the instances in which the Director of Information, sitting in his office and relying on reports of officials who like him had never been on the spot, provided the amusing spectacle of the accused judging. The situation was made much worse when the Governor of the province entered on a

defence of Goverment policy in a private letter, elaborately excused his Government and ended in accusing it all the more.

Among the public men who evinced an interest in the Bardoli question and tried to help the peasants' cause, Sjt. K. M. Munshi's name deserves prominent mention. We shall have to speak at length about him in a later chapter. It is sufficient to note here that towards the end of May he addressed a number of letters to His Excellency Sir Leslie Wilson, and laid especial emphasis on the fact that he had written the letters as a strict constitutionalist and not "as a non-co-operator threatening non-payment of taxes." It was perhaps because he strictly defined his position, that he was able to draw the Governor out. Sjt. Munshi pleaded for the issue in Bardoli not to be allowed to alter its aspect. The Governor in the very first letter revealed his anxiety, of course unconscious, to cloud the issue. "In the case of Bardoli, a definite attempt is being made to coerce Government by the use of the weapon of civil disobedience," he said, completely ignoring the fact that there was no such attempt, and that the leader of Bardoli was day in and day out reiterating the fact that the demand was one for a full and independent inquiry. "With regard to your remarks about an impartial inquiry," he said, "I am convinced myself that no further inquiry could elicit any further facts . . . that a further inquiry has been made, for it so happened that Mr. Rieu, the Revenue Member, went on leave, and Mr. Hatch, a very experienced Revenue Officer, took his place. Mr. Hatch has gone through all the papers with an entirely independent mind, and has come to the conclusion that the increase of assessment proposed by Government is very low. . . . I can assure you that there is not

one member of Government who is not fully satisfied as to the justice of Government's action, and in fact I should really use the word generosity." He forgot however, that what the people wanted was not generosity but justice pure and simple. The Governor on the contrary contended, that *if* a committee were appointed it would recommend a much higher enhancement in the assessment. Why then did he fight shy of the very reasonable prayer of the people that a proper committee of inquiry should be appointed?

In another letter Sjt. Munshi told His Excellency, that the determination of Government to refuse the reasonable request of the people "will result either in the elimination of the existing agriculturists in Bardoli or in bloodshed; and in either case will result, if in nothing else, in deep and lasting embitterment. . . . Even admitting what Your Excellency is pleased to state that the reassessment has been generous, an opportunity of allowing it to be recognised as just should not have been denied." It is in reply to this letter that His Excellency revealed the naked paw: "Why should Government give up its undoubted right of administration to, as you suggest, the decision of some independent committee? I am anxious to meet the situation in every way possible, but no Government can concede the right of private individuals to usurp the functions of Government, and no Government would be worth the name of Government which allowed such a thing to happen."

It was in reply to this, that Gandhiji reiterated once again the demand of the people, and in a lucid article exposed the falsity of the Government's position:

"The undoubted right of administration is the uncontrolled licence to bleed India to the point of

starvation. The licence would be somewhat controlled if an independent committee were appointed to adjust the points in dispute between the people and the executive authority. Let it be noted, that the independent committee does not mean a committee independent of the Government. It means a committee appointed by the Government of men known to be independent of official pressure and authorised to hold the enquiry in the open with the right to the aggrieved people to be duly and effectively represented. But such an open inquiry means the death knell of the secret, autocratic revenue policy of the Government. Where is, in the modest demand of the people, the slightest 'usurpation of the functions of Government'? But even the least check upon the utter independence of the executive officers is enough to send the Government into a fury. And when the British lion is in a fury in British India, God help the 'gentle Hindoo.' Well, God does help the helpless, and He only helps when man is utterly helpless. The people of India have found in Satyagraha the God-given infallible *Ramabana* of self-suffering. Under its stimulating influence the people are slowly waking up from the lethargy of ages. The Bardoli peasants are but showing India, that weak as they are, they have got the courage to suffer for their convictions.

"It is too late in the day to call Satyagraha unconstitutional. It will be unconstitutional when truth and its fellow — self-sacrifice — become unlawful. Lord Hardinge blessed the South African Satyagraha, and even the all-powerful Union Government gracefully bent before it. Both Lord Chelmsford, the then Viceroy, and Sir Edward Gait, the then

Governor of Bihar, recognised its legitimacy and efficacy, and an independent committee was appointed, adding to the prestige of the Government and resulting in the ending of a century-old wrong. It was then recognised in Kheda, and a settlement, reluctant, half-hearted and incomplete as it was, was made between the Government's agents in Kheda and those who were guiding the movement and the people. The then Governor of the Central Provinces condescended to treat with the Nagpur Flag Satyagrahis and released the prisoners and recognised the right claimed by the Satyagrahis. Last but not least, Sir Leslie Wilson himself, when he was yet untouched by the atmosphere of the 'most efficient service in the world,' recognised its efficacy in Borsad and granted the Borsad people relief.

"I wish both His Excellency the Governor and Sjt. Munshi will take note of these facts that have happened within the past fourteen pears. Satyagraha in Bardoli cannot now be suddenly declared unconstitutional. The fact is the Government have no case. They do not want their revenue policy to be challenged at an open inquiry. If the Bardoli people can stand the final heat, they will have the open inquiry or the withdrawal of the enhancement. It is their undoubted right to claim for their grievance a hearing before an an impartial tribunal."

CHAPTER XXIII

PROSTITUTION OF JUSTICE

"Man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority
Most ignorant of what he is most assured."

— *Shakespeare*

WE have in the foregoing chapters referred to the trials of Satyagrahis in the Resident Magistrate's court at Bardoli. We propose to narrate in this chapter in some detail how the administration of justice in the taluka had become a sheer travesty of justice, and contributed no less than the methods of the *japti* officers, to cover Government with ignominy and ridicule. The chief crime of all the accused put up for trial in the Resident Magistrate's and other courts was non-payment of the revenue or carrying on propaganda in that behalf. The Resident Magistrate had hardly any special qualifications for the task to which he was called. If anything, his rank as an ordinary officer of the Revenue Department positively disqualified him from trying cases arising out of a revenue dispute. One is familiar with the special tribunals presided over by High Court judges in the Martial Law days of 1919. Men of the rank of High Court judges were in those days not found to rise

superior to the prevailing atmosphere and convicted well known citizens to savage sentences many of which had to be afterwards quashed or substantially reduced. If then the Resident Magistrate, trying his cases in Bardoli in an atmosphere surcharged with high feeling, failed to deal justice in cases coming up before him, there is nothing surprising. A cursory glance at some of his judgments shows, that sentences like these, —and frequently the same stereotyped sentences—occur in every one of them: "The complainant states his simple story in a very straightforward manner, and there is no reason to disbelieve him. Neither the complainant nor any one of the prosecution witnesses have got any enmity with the accused. There is no reason to disbelieve any one of the prosecution witnesses." Because most of the accused having no faith in the law courts did neither defend themselves, nor cite any witnesses, the Resident Magistrate saw "no reason to disbelieve any of the prosecution witnesses." Section 186, 189 and 447 of the Penal Code were interpreted to bring within their purview any and every act forming part of the non-payment campaign, and even a post-card, asking a Nazar, who acted as the guardian of the property of a minor, not to pay assessment on behalf of the minor who resided in Bardoli, was used as a pretext for prosecution for coercing a public servant! Of course the Resident Magistrate had nothing to do with this case. The Sessions Judge, Surat, discharged the notice at once.

Sjt. Ravishankar Vyas, a man honoured for his saintly character and as much known to the Mamlatdar, the complainant, as to any Satyagrahi, was convicted of criminal trespass, because he dared to enter the Mamlatdar's compound, without any intention

of molesting or annoying the Mamlatdar. Section 186 necessitates some overt act of intimidation, and yet without any proof of any overt act, Sjts. Ravishankar and Chinai and Sanmukhlal were convicted of offences under the Section. In Sjt. Chinai's case all that the accused had done was, to use the language of the judgment, "to persuade Khushal Natha in the presence of the Mamlatdar not to pay up the arrears," and to have "told Khushal Natha to throw away the *jahernama*." Khushal Natha was not at all examined, but the actual words of the persuasion as described by two prosecution witnesses were no worse than these: "Chinai told Khushal to pay up if he wanted to, and to say 'no if he did not want to.'" This persuasion or dissuasion was considered by the Magistrate enough to be an offence under Section 186 of the Penal Code!

In the case in which Sjt. Sanmukhlal was tried under Section 189, the facts as detailed by the Magistrate were, that while the complainant and the revenue peons and the special *japti* officer were attaching three bags of *juvari* from the house of one Pranjivandas, the accused held out 'threats of injury of social boycott' to the Talati and to the peons, 'for the purpose of inducing them not to do the *japti* work.'

The Talati was the complainant and the peons were the prosecution witnesses. The special *japti* officer, whose evidence would have been of some value, was not called as witness at all, and the complainant said, "Sanmukhlal came and said, 'You are doing *japti*, but tomorrow morning you will see the result.'" The present writer happened to be present in the court while the case was being tried. One of the witnesses deposed, after much coaxing by the prosecutor, that

some threat of social boycott was held out, and to use the language of the judgment "from Patawala Soma" (second prosecution witness), "it appears that the Gandhivala told them that they, complainant and peons, would see next day the result of what they were doing at that time." The witness was expressly asked who the Gandhivalas were, and he said: "How do I know them?" The prosecutor wanted him to point out Sanmukhlal as the 'Gandhivala' in question, but he refused to take the hint! The accused, it may be noted, pleaded not guilty, and stated that the case against him was false.

Without taking the slightest trouble to sift the evidence, the Magistrate found, that the accused was guilty of the offence of holding out threats of injury, and passed a 'deterrent' sentence of rigorous imprisonment for six months.

Now even if we assume, that the facts as recorded were all true, and the complainant was also truthful, the most that could be found against the accused was that he held out the threat that the complainant and the peons would be socially boycotted. One of the witnesses, by the bye, deposed that they were boycotted for a couple of days and then the boycott had been withdrawn! Is social boycott an offence under Section 189 of the I. P. C.? Injury denotes any harm whatever *illegally* caused to any person. Is social boycott such injury? The law is expressly against regarding social boycott as illegal injury or criminal intimidation. There was no evidence led to show what the social boycott was to consist of. There was thus, even assuming that everything complained against the accused was proved (and hardly anything was proved), no warrant for the conviction and the 'deterrent' sentence.

Take again the judgment in the case of Emperor *v.* Shivanand and Amritlal. The complainant in the case was a stoutly built up-country Musalman, a police constable, and the witnessess were a motor driver and a cleaner. The substance of the complaint was, that the accused 'told the complainant and others that they were doing the work of a low-born *bhangi dhedh*,' that 'the accused No. 2 raised his hands and or rushed upon the complainant,' and 'the accused No. 1 actually beat a push to the complainant' (I am quoting from the Magistrate's English judgment —'beat a push' being his translation of Hindustani *dhakka mara*, *i. e.*, gave a push.)

Both the accused pleaded not guilty, and the first accused submitted as evidence photographs of the transaction to show, that the whole story was false, and that the accused No. 2 was not on the scene at all, as also to show that the *japti* officer who, according to the complainant and the witnesses, was not on the scene at all, was there watching the operations. The Magistrate dismissed this evidence as valueless. If he had cared to serve the ends of justice, he could easily have asked the prosecution witnesses if the photographs correctly represented the transaction. But he did nothing of the kind, found that the accused had offered resistance inasmuch as they said to the complainant and others, that 'they were doing the work of a low-born *bhangi* or *dhedh*,' and also found, that the accused had raised their hands and 'actually beat a push' to the complainant—a burly Baloch whose one blow could have crushed them to atoms! The learned Magistrate sentenced them to three months' rigorous imprisonment under Section 183 and to six months' rigorous imprisonment under Section 353, and ordered the sentences *to run consecutively* !

Now here, too, even if we assume that all the facts complained against the accused were proved (and we doubt if anything was proved), the offence of resistance was not proved against them; and that even if both offences committed during the same transaction were proved against them, separate sentences under Sections 183 and 353 could not be passed against the accused under the express provisions of Section 71 of the Indian Penal Code. The Magistrate not only failed in his duty to sift the evidence before him, but betrayed a sad ignorance of the law.

I have already referred to the case in which three lads were sentenced to two months' simple imprisonment for sitting on the road opposite the gate of the bungalow of the Collector's compound !

In the case in which 19 persons from Vankaner were charged with rioting and wrongful restraint, the facts as stated in the judgment were that carts driven by revenue peons and escorted by police constables arrived at Vankaner *chora* at 8 P. M., and "as it was night time, they stopped the carts on the road at a distance of ten paces from the *chora* and the three peons went inside to take *vethias* and a lantern," and the carts, as they proceeded with the *vethia,* were waylaid by a crowd of 150 persons, one of the persons in the crowd catching hold of the nose-strings of one of the bullocks. The *vethia* with his lantern was dragged away into the crowd, and the Talati came on the scene in the meantime. "The policemen had not got their guns with them, but in order to disperse the crowd, the complainant told the other constable to hold up his gun. On hearing about the guns, the accused and others dispersed and went away to a

little distance, and the *vethia* was taken away with the lantern. The peon and constable went to the police Patel and told him the facts. The Patel did not go with them to the scene of offence, but gave another lantern to the peons, and the carts proceeded."

At an identification parade, which was not held until 11 days after the alleged offence, and which could not have been held unless Sr. Kalyanji and Shrimati Manibehn Patel, Sjt. Vallabhbhai's daughter, had induced the people to come out of their houses, the witnesses picked out persons clad in Khadi. Sjt. Vallabhbhai's motor cleaner, who had accompanied Sjt. Kalyanji and Manibehn, and who was as innocent as themselves, was purposely asked by them to get mixed up with the people who had gathered for the parade. Bhogilal, a student of the Gujarat Vidyapith, who was a volunteer attached to the Vankaner camp, but who was not in Vankaner on the day of the incident, was also amongst the people. Now as for some reasons or other the witnesses chose to pick out only the Khadi-wearers from the people assembled, this Vidypith student and this motor cleaner also had their chance to be placed on the list of the accused!

It is unnecessary to expose the worthlessness of this identification parade. Several witnesses who appeared before the Munshi Committee deposed to methods with which witnesses had been raised for the identification. No wonder five of the accused had to be discharged, three were acquitted on trial, and eleven were sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment for offences under Sections 147 and 353 and 149, and simple imprisonment for one month under Section 341—thanks this time to the Magistrate's better appreciation of law, the sentences were to run concurrently. Five of these eleven appealed, with the

result that the convictions of four were set aside on the ground of insufficient identification!

In another case Bhavan Hira, a meek, guileless peasant, was charged under Sections 186 and 353 for assault and using criminal force against a public servant. Bhavan's wife all along stated to the police officers, that if it was an offence to shut the door against the *japti* officer, it was she who had committed the offence, that her husband was nowhere near the scene of offence. The accused altogether denied the charge. In this case the conviction cannot be questioned if the facts alleged by the prosecution were true, but it would appear, that the evidence was entirely insufficient, especially because the wife of the accused who took the guilt upon herself was deliberately not called as witness.

In another case Gopalji, a volunteer, was prosecuted for removing a forfeiture notice from the wall of an occupant's house. The accused in his statement said, that rather than allow the notice to be swept away by the wind, as it was fastened to the wall with thorns, he had removed it and kept it in his possession on behalf of the occupant. But this removal of the notice was considered by the learned magistrate as enough to constitute an offence under Section 173 of the Indian Penal Code, and the accused was convicted and sentenced to one month's simple imprisonment!

The recklessness with which prosecutions were launched and sentences were pronounced is evident in all these cases. In only one case the magistrate — not the one who tried the cases referred to above, but another magistrate with lesser powers — refused to prosecute a peasant on the ground of the entire absence of evidence, and persuaded the police to withdraw the case

at the end of two months. It was a case as trivial as most of those that have been detailed above, but the circumstances are somewhat noteworthy and may be cited as an instance of what the righteous indignation of a truthful peasant could do. The accused was a peasant from Rayam. He had been summoned to stand his trial for refusing to obey a public servant's order. He was almost beside himself with joy. "This is the first time I shall be getting up the steps of a law court," he said to me. "For the last fifty years within my memory not a single man from my village has had occasion to go to court. We have quarrels of course, but we always settle them ourselves." This man was put up before a third class magistrate for an offence under Section 174. The Sub-Inspector of police was the complainant. He deposed that he had ordered this man to serve as a *panch* but he had refused. "Was the order in writing?" asked the magistrate. "Yes," said the Sub-Inspector, accustomed to speak in undertones and monosyllables. The peasant had heard not a word of the story. When however the Sub-Inspector's deposition was read out to him, the peasant sprang from his seat, his eyes red with rage, and said in a voice that shook the court, the good-humoured magistrate laughing all the while: "Are you saying all this with God as witness?" "With God as witness!" he thundered and indignantly asked the Sub-Inspector: "Are you telling the *truth* when you say that you gave me a written order?" He was a God-fearing man and was outraged at God's name being outraged. Lying may be quite common in a law court, but the good peasant had never before been to such 'temples of justice.'

Later on he cited two or three witnesses to prove that no written order had been served on him. The

magistrate was completely puzzled. He dared not convict the peasant, and if he acquitted him, the Sub-Inspector might have to stand his trial for perjury. The case was ultimately withdrawn.

All these cases were launched to break the spirit of the brave peasants. But they succeeded in producing quite the contrary effect. If the peasant in the last case could not restrain his righteous indignation before the magistrate, others who were tried and convicted knew that they were wrongly convicted and that their innocence and their pure suffering was sure to help the cause. Every one of them went cheerfully to jail, and the villages which gave them send-offs were proud of their heroes.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WOMEN OF BARDOLI

"Does she wind clinging arms around him, telling him with tears, of their childern and his early vows, and beseeching to think of his love and forget his country? No."

— *Terrence MacSwiney*

TWO secrets of the Sardar's success have already been noticed. The third was his call to women. We know that in the early meetings the women were conspicuous by their absence, but from April onwards, women began to outnumber men and sometimes to have their own separate meetings. We know how slowly yet surely they rallied to the cause until the Sardar felt that the women of Bardoli should by themselves be able to win the battle. The reason why the Sardar made a special appeal to the women was not the trite one that it was as much their cause as men's, but the very real one that in simplicity, purity and steadfastness of purpose they were far better than their men. During our tour with the Broomfield Committee, we went to a village to collect preliminary information. We were asking about the condition of the *Dublas*, and whether the Kanbis gave them the proper measure of rice. The men said, 'Yes.' One of the women who were carefully listening to us from inside,





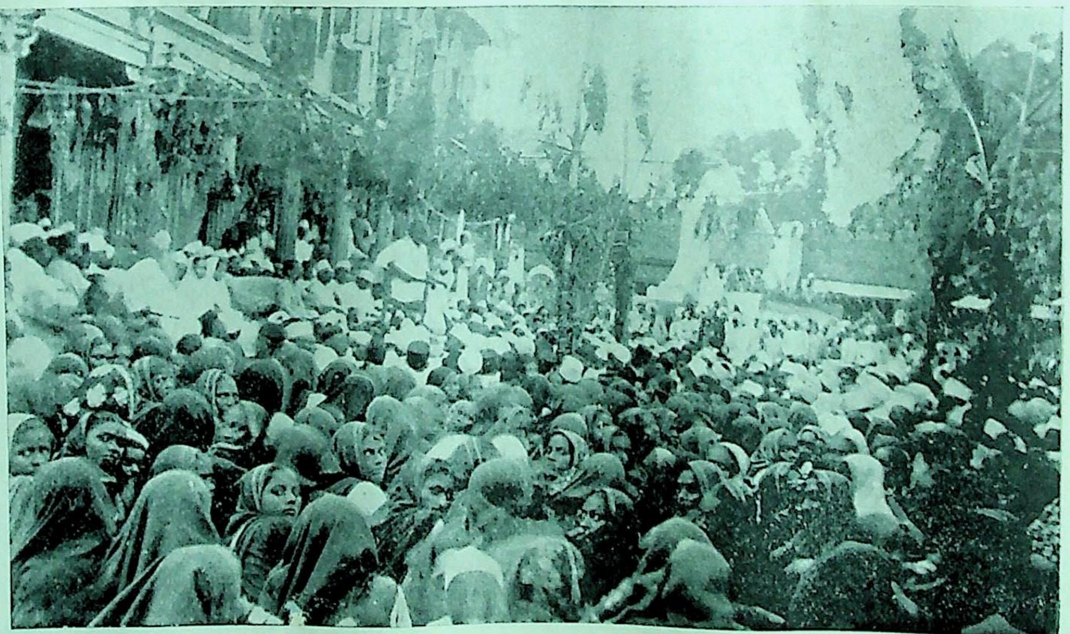
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A WOMEN'S MEETING

p. 210

rushed out and exclaimed: "No lies before these friends. Let us confess that we do not give the proper measure. The *Dublas* trouble us a lot, and we also do not deal with them fairly. That is why we are in such a wretched plight." There were some men who were ashamed of confessing their indebtedness. One of the women sternly said to him, "Why are you ashamed of telling the truth? It is this false sense of shame that has been our undoing."

We have seen how they thronged the meetings lustily singing Satyagraha songs, and how they stood firm against the *japti* depredations. What would they do when their men would be torn away from them and sent to jail, we wondered. Sanmukhlal's mother, an elderly lady of culture, had been already weighed and not found wanting. But what about the uncultured Kanbi women? A girl of 14 provided the answer in an informal speech that she made in welcoming the Sardar on behalf of the women of her place: "We are sorry that Ravishankarbhai the head of our camp has gone to jail, but we are glad to inform you that his imprisonment has made us stronger. We too have had forfeiture notices and our menfolk might now have their turn to go to jail. We have told our father that when his turn comes he should gladly go to jail, because in his absence we two sisters would look after the fields." When a large party of peasants was arrested at Vankaner, Government must naturally have expected that they might thereby be able to strike terror in the hearts of the people. No fear. Some of the wives of the men who were arrested attended the court, and followed their husbands to the station where they were taken roped and handcuffed in pairs under strong police escort. Sorrow there may have been in the women's hearts,

but there was none on their faces and they joined in the hearty cheering as the train moved out of the station platform.

Towards the end of the struggle a meek Kanbi peasant was prosecuted for obstructing a Government servant and causing him injury. The heroism of this peasant's wife reached the pitch of romance. She knew that her husband had been picked out because of his meek and submissive nature, for if there had been any offence it was she who was guilty of it. She pleaded with the police telling them that it was she who had closed the doors against the attachment officer and that her husband was not even present on the spot. But the police would not listen to her. They arrested the man and put him up for the trial. Well, she followed him to the court. Before the trial however she brought her husband to the Swaraj Ashram to receive Sjt. Vallabhbhai's blessings, and this is what she said addressing him, in the presence of the Sardar: "Look, now. No faltering timid word before the Magistrate! Ask him to give as severe a sentence as he desires. Do not think of me and the babies. Be of good cheer and answer all questions in firm and manly accents." And then turning to the Sardar: "What a pity! They did not prosecute me. Otherwise I should have shown them what a woman can do. What is there in going to jail? I should have done more than my share of the task given to prisoners in jail. One maund of corn flour is nothing. I should have done a maund and a half. My husband is quite ready to go to jail, but he is of a very retiring nature and cannot face the police and the magistrates bravely. I in his place should give them answers that they would not easily forget." After these the two went to the court. As soon as the sentence of six

months' rigorous imprisonment was pronounced, she said to her husband, "Go bravely to jail. Such an opportunity does not come easily. Do not worry about me or the babies. We will be quite happy. May God give you strength and courage." She gave him a hearty send-off, went to the Sardar again, expressed her thankfulness that her husband had won the rare honour of going to jail, and laid at the feet of the Sardar Rs. 9 that her husband had received as congratulatory presents from friends and admirers. No wonder that the fortitude of the wife proved infectious. The husband went cheerfully to jail and returned a more spirited man.

Two more cases of women who did not distinguish themselves in battle, but who were typical of the stuff these women were made of. Towards the close of the struggle when Gandhiji came to Bardoli he visited a place called Rayam. There was a meeting and a spinning demonstration and what not. But there was also an ailing woman who wanted to see Gandhiji as she knew that she was at death's door. Gandhiji went to her house. She was mere skin and bone, but a smile lit up her face, as she saw Gandhiji. She had her yarn garland ready but it was impossible for her to stand or sit up to garland him. So Gandhiji bent down before her, she gratefully put the garland on his neck, *kumkum* on his forehead, gave him a five rupee note and asked for his blessings. "Be of good cheer and keep peaceful," said Gandhiji. The next day she said: "I am going and am quite happy and peaceful. Cover me with a peace of pure white Khaddar when I go." Within an hour or two she passed away.

The other friend was an apparently healthy looking girl of twenty. She had come to Bardoli to receive

her father who was one of the Vankaner heroes who had been sent to jail and who was to arrive the next morning as all the Satyagraha prisoners were to be released. She had come all the way from Vankaner on foot but soon after she arrived in Bardoli she had an acute intestinal trouble and towards the close of the day was writhing in agony. All the medical aid that could be got her was given, but she went on getting worse and worse. At three o'clock in the morning she said: "Pray call Mahatmaji to my bedside. I want to have his last *darshan.*" Gandhiji soon came. She had lost her eyesight, but as soon as Gandhiji accosted her, she said: "I cannot see you, but I recognise your voice. Will some one fold up my hands? I want to do my last obeisance to Gandhiji." Next she asked for Vallabhbhai, and before daybreak she passed away. Her mother was not near her, her father was expected that morning, but her last thoughts were not with them. She was thinking of Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai.

Well that is enough to show that the women of Bardoli knew not only how to live, but also how to die, and that the Sardar knew what stuff they were made of when he depended on them.

But we are yet far from the close of the struggle, of which the grimmest act was yet to be enacted.

CHAPTER XXV

THE INTERCEDERS

"One hears rumours of intercessions by well-meaning friends. They have the right, it may be even their duty, to intercede. But let these friends realise the significance of the movement. They are not to represent a weak cause or a weak people. The people of Bardoli stand for an absolutely just cause. They ask no favour, they ask only justice. . . . Those therefore who will intervene will harm the people and their cause, if they do not appreciate the implications of the struggle which cannot be lightly given up or compromised."

—*Gandhiji*

THESE words of warning at the head the chapter were addressed by Gandhiji to those, who, he was told, were interceding on behalf of the people of Bardoli and to those who were likely to do so in future. We have already referred to one of these interceders who, we admit, with the best of intentions, did considerable harm to the cause by starting or bolstering up the plea of 'full payment first.' He did so because he failed to appreciate the value of voluntary suffering imposed by the people upon themselves and he wanted to end it anyhow. There now entered on the scene several more interceders, who be it said to their credit realised what the people were fighting for, and if they did not entirely appear on

their behalf as advocates, they did their best to put the people's case in all its bearings. It would have been more fortunate if they all had visited Bardoli aud acted on the evidence of their own eyes and ears and understanding. One of them however did so to his lasting credit and put the results of his own inquiries before the public in a manner which at once arrested public attention and made Bardoli the cynosure of all eyes in a greater degree than even before. We refer of course to Sjt. K. M. Munshi, a member of the Legislative Council for the Bombay University, and an advocate of the Bombay High Court whose correspondence with His Excellency the Governor we adverted to in a preceding chapter. As we have seen, the replies that his letters elicited from His Excellency the Governor were such as would fail to satisfy even a confirmed constitutionalist as he. He waited on His Excellency, and when even the interview failed to satisfy him, he decided to visit Bardoli to see things for himself in order that he might be better able to determine his course of action. Accordingly he went to Bardoli and visited village after village attending meetings and talking to villagers—both men and women, and as a result of this visit felt compelled, a determined constitutionalist as he was, to resort "to the sad necessity of adopting an emphatic mode of expressing his protest." On the 17th June he addressed a brave letter to His Excellency in which he described in vivid detail the conditions of the people of Bardoli and the helplessness to which their patient unresisting suffering had reduced the revenue officials in the taluka. Let it be remembered that Sjt. Munshi decided to go to Bardoli after addressing several letters to Government, and after having done all he could to awaken them

to a sense of their bare duty; that he went to Bardoli, not at the invitation of the Sardar or of the people; that in popular quarters his sympathy for the cause was regarded at best as lukewarm; that no one was prepared for his resignation; and that he went there with complete detachment. But the personal visit proved an unexpected eye-opener and he addressed the letter principally with a view to opening the eyes of the Government. The letter which naturally attracted wide public attention and which was reproduced by the press throughout India is thus a document of first-rate importance in the history of the struggle.

"80,000 men, women and children," he said in the course of it, "are inspired by a determined spirit of organised opposition. Your *japti* officer has to travel miles before he can get a shave. Your officer's car which got stuck would have remained in the mud but for Mr. Vallabhbhai, officially styled 'agitator living on Bardoli.' Garda to whom lands worth thousands have been sold for a nominal amount does not get even a scavenger for his house. The Collector gets no conveyance on the railway station unless one is given by Mr. Vallabhbhai's sanction. In the few villages which I visited not a man, or woman, was either sorry for the attitude or shaken in faith which he or she had adopted, and as Mr. Vallabhbhai passed through village after village I saw men, women and children coming out with spontaneous homage; I saw illiterate women, old and young, in their tatters painting his forehead with the mark of victory, laying at his feet, for their sacred cause, their hard-earned rupee or two; singing in their rustic accents songs of 'the misdeeds of the hapless Government' and I had to confess myself that the official reports of an artificial agitation forced on an unwilling people were, to put it very

mildly grossly inaccurate. Men laugh at your Government's attempts at terrorisation. They have borne well and are prepared to brave more. The most polite form in which they refer to Mr. Smart is a 'tiger with a voracious appetite for buffaloes' and the *japti* officer as a 'Chhota Commissioner!' I dare not put on paper the most modest phrase which they reserve for that enterprising and ambitious Mr. Almoula who I wish in the interests of Government would be as sober as he is zealous. . . . In order to save their beloved cattle 80,000 men, women children with these cattle have locked themselves up in small and insanitary houses for over three months. As I passed through villages, silent, empty and deserted with sentinels posted at different ends, I saw women peeping through the barred windows to see whether it was the arrival of the *japti* officer and on being reassured the doors being opened I was taken inside and I saw the darkness, the stench, the filth; and the men, women and children who had herded for months in the same room with their beloved cattle miserable, lacerated, grown whitish by disease and as I heard their determination to remain in that condition for months rather than abandon their cattle to the tender mercies of the *japti* officer I could not help thinking that the imagination which conceived the dire *japti* methods, the severity which had enforced them and the policy which had sanctioned them were difficult to be found outside the pages of a history of medieval times."

He next went on to describe the "vindictive victor's" methods determined "to spread the greatest measure of woe," and the various instances of mockery of justice, and said that "the cheap sneers of lofty bureaucrats, the extraordinarily severe sentences for

technical offences, the thunders of arrogant proclamations and the official sabre-rattlings have ceased to excite anything but ridicule." Towards the end of his letter he exposed the hollowness of the much-vaunted majority vote on Bardoli, and said that by manipulating votes Government had made it impossible for any constitutionalist to stand by the Government, and that the "only reply which lies in my power is to resign my seat in the Council and to appeal to my presidency-wide constituency to indicate their verdict on this issue."

The letter sent a thrill through the hearts of all who had any fellow-feeling for their compatriots and placed the Bardoli question in the forefront of all questions engaging public attention. And Sjt. Munshi did not rest satisfied with merely submitting his resignation. He took upon himself the task of subjecting the methods of frightfulness to a regular judicial examination by a committee composed of himself and Mr. Huseinbhai Lalji, M.L.C., Dr. Gilder, M.D., F.R.C.S., M.L.C., Rao Bahadur Bhimbhai Naik, M.L.C., and Sjts. Shivdasani, M.L.C., Chandrachud, M.L.C., and B. G. Kher, Solicitor (Secretary). They examined 126 witnesses in Bardoli through lawyers from Surat and Bombay who had volunteered their services. They invited Government to assist them in their inquiry but they declined, with the result that their inquiry had an incompleteness "inherent in every inquiry not conducted in a contested case in a court of law." But they took special care to see that their conclusions were supported by overwhelming and unimpeachable evidence. The conclusions of the inquiry are summarised in one of the appendices.

In his famous letter Sjt. Munshi had expressed a hope that the letter "may awaken in your Government a desire to make personal investigations." Whilst it

failed to move His Excellency or the Revenue Member to pay a visit to Bardoli, Sjt. Munshi may legitimately claim that it was because of his letter that Government directed Mr. Smart, the Commissioner, to visit the taluka for the first time during the struggle. The letter certainly dispelled the slumbers of many others.

Amongst the interceders may next be mentioned Sir Purshottamdas Thakordas and other members of the Indian Merchants' Chamber of Commerce. It would appear that Sir Purshottamdas early in June saw the Commissioner at Surat at the instance of the Collector. He invited Sjt. Vallabhbhai to go and meet him at Surat, so that he might be able to bring about a friendly discussion between the Commissioner and the Sardar. The Sardar had pressing engagements and could not go but deputed the present writer to go and have a talk with Sir Purshottamdas. Sir Purshottamdas said he had had long talks with Mr. Smart and found him ready to go any length to crush the movement, and quite hopeful that the bulk of Satyagrahis would surrender by the end of the month. The writer made it clear to Sir Purshottamdas and he made it clear to the Commissioner that the latter had not a true measure of the strength of endurance of Satyagrahis and that the methods adopted by the *japti* officers and the behaviour of the Pathans had earned for Government an unenviable reputation. He next got his Chamber to consider the question of their representative Mr. Lalji Naranji resigning his seat on the Legislative Council on the Bardoli issue. Mr. Modi, the Chairman of the Chamber, thereupon addressed to His Excellency the Governor to understand the Government attitude but found that the Chamber was none the wiser for the correspondence. His Excellency adopted a sterner attitude in his replies to the Chamber than he had done

in his letters to Sjt. Munshi. Sir Purshottamdas now saw Gandhiji at Sabarmati where he had also requested Sjt. Vallabhbhai to be present with a view to ascertaining the Satyagrahis' minimum demand, as a deputation from his Chamber was thinking of waiting on His Excellency with a request to him to bring about a settlement. Having met Gandhiji, Sir Purshottamdas accompanied Messrs. Modi and Lalji Naranji in a deputation to wait on His Excellency the Governor at Poona. Sir Purshottamdas has told the present writer what a disappointment that conference with His Excellency and the members of the Government was. Sir Purshottamdas was very keen on His Excellency inviting Sjt. Vallabhbhai to a conference which would help to clear all the misunderstanding between them and to hasten the settlement. The very suggestion of His Excellency inviting a 'revolutionary' like Sjt. Vallabhbhai to a conference was like gall and wormwood to some of the 'strong men' present at the conference. It was therefore no use proceeding with the Conference. Sir Purshottamdas later had a private interview with His Excellency. He found him most sympathetic, but naturally averse "to be beaten all along the time." "The assessment ought to be paid up first or at any rate the peasants ought to deposit the enhanced amount with a third party before an inquiry could be given"—that was the minimum, on which His Excellency insisted. The Deputation returned with a hope that they "may be able to help the parties concerned to come to a settlement." On return to Bombay, Sir Purshottamdas met Sjt. Vallabhbhai, and described to him all that had happened at the interview. Both were agreed that there was no meeting-ground between the Government and the Satyagrahis.

As a result of further discussion in the Chamber, Sjt. Lalji Naranji resigned his seat on the Legislative Council declaring in his letter of resignation that it was absurd to insist on the payment of the enhanced assessment before the demand for an impartial inquiry was conceded.

It is difficult to say what effect these intercessions had in preparing the Government for a settlement. They certainly did not disturb the people. "Do not be anxious for a premature settlement," the Sardar had said to them. "You know what happens if you pluck and taste an unripe mango? It will simply set your teeth on edge. On the other hand if you allow it to ripen it will drop of itself in due season and your patience will be rewarded with its delicious flavour and sweet juice. . . . When the time is ripe for a settlement we shall know it without being told by any one. Today I see no signs of a change of heart on the part of Government. Only yesterday the Resident Magistrate sentenced an innocent peasant from Nani Falod to six months' rigorous imprisonment, because his wife and some other women shut their doors in the face of a *japti* officer who followed by a few Pathans was about to enter it. So long as the Government persists in its career of repression and refuses to show any signs of contrition, there can be no talk of a settlement."

But whatever may be the result of the intercessions, every one will admit that the very fact of a number of prominent men belonging to 'business-absorbed' Bombay so keenly interesting themselves in a movement which Government at any rate regarded as 'political,' and of which the leader was being characterised as a 'revolutionary' by the hot heads among the bureaucrats, marks a remarkable advance in the political life of the country.

CHAPTER XXVI

IMPARTIAL WITNESSES

"The virtue of justice consists in moderation, as regulated by wisdom."

—*Aristotle*

IF the active interest taken by 'business-absorbed' Bombay in the Bardoli Satyagraha was a notable event, the way in which public men in other provinces, including the most prominent of the Liberals, rallied in support of the struggle was even more notable. If one may distinguish the two, the interceders' interest was more a humanitarian interest, the Liberals' was one in the cause of justice. The humanitarians decided to intercede more with a view to save the Satyagrahis from suffering and ultimate ruin than to support their cause, the Liberals studied the struggle, bore testimony to the justice of the cause, supported it to that extent, and then allowed it to run its course. Perhaps Bardoli is the only popular movement which enlisted the sympathy and support of men of all parties of thought and opinion.

In the third week of June Pandit Hridaynath Kunzru accompanied by Sjt. Vaze, Editor of the *Servant of India*, and Sjt. Amritlal Thakkar, all members of the Servants of India Society, went to Bardoli to study the movement at first hand. They armed them-

selves with the settlement reports, studied them, and then went off to the villages to examine the Satyagrahis' allegations and the justice of their demand for an inquiry. Theirs was an even more detached viewpoint than Sjt. Munshi's. So far as a study of the people's sufferings and their heroic struggle was concerned, Sjt. Munshi had done the needful and no one could improve upon it. These friends' work was not to describe the condition of the taluka, they confined themselves strictly to the revenue inquiry. During their visits a friend who took them round to the villages offered to take them to some Khadi areas to show what Khadi had done for the people. They thankfully declined the offer. It is this detachment that constitutes the value of their inquiry and of the conclusions to which they arrived.

In their report, absolutely pruned of epithets and adjectives, and as closely reasoned and concise as it could be, they addressed themselves to the consideration of four questions: "As the enhancement is based on rents which landowners demand from their tenants it is of utmost importance to determine whether the table relating to the rents paid by the tenants has been prepared with due care so as to exhibit economic rents only. If it is found to be seriously defective, all conclusions drawn from it must be regarded as valueless. Again, it seems reasonable that before competitive rents are accepted as the foundation of the settlement policy, it should be determined what proportion of the cultivated area is in the hands of tenants paying cash rents. The third question which demands consideration is whether abnormal periods have been excluded in inquiring into the course followed by rents during the currency of the old settlement. Lastly we have to consider to what extent

the Land Revenue Code and the Settlement Manual justify almost exclusive reliance on rental value for the purpose of determining new assessment rates." And after a study of the Code and the Settlement Manual and after personal investigation and inquiries made in several villages from the people concerned, they found

1. That the table was seriously defective inasmuch as mortgage transactions, or rents not realised in full, or conditional sales, had not been excluded, and no allowance was made for rents charged in consequence of improvements made at the cost of the occupant according to Section 107 of the Land Revenue Code.

2. That the cash rented area may be taken to be in the neighbourhood of 20 per cent. and that looking to the fact that "94 per cent. of the occupants and owners cultivate themselves" in 1895, even a proportion of 30 per cent. as the land cultivated by tenants appears surprisingly large today.

3. That the boom period covering the years between 1918-19 to 1924-25 should have been excluded according to the statement made by the Revenue Member himself.

4. That the Settlement Commissioner relied on insufficient and unscrutinised rental statistics as his "one true guide," not to check the results of the indirect inquiry, but to avoid having to consider and allow for an increase in the cost of cultivation, and that he used them not "to prevent the enhancement from going too high" (in the words of Settlement Manual) but to enhance the assessment rates.

In view of the foregoing findings Sjts. Kunzru, Vaze and Thakkar came to the conclusion that "the demand for a fresh inquiry is fully justified" and that "recent announcement that revision settlement of the

Viramgam taluka will be reconsidered makes the case for the reconsideration of the settlement of the Bardoli taluka unanswerable."

Sjt. Vaze issued an additional statement in which he laid special emphasis on the fact that "the present struggle in Bardoli is a purely economic one; it is no part of a general scheme of mass civil disobedience. . . . My observation satisfies me that the leaders of the movement are actuated by no other motive in carrying on the campaign than to undo, by using their best endeavours, what they genuinely believe to be a cruel wrong to the peasantry of Bardoli. It would be both inexpedient and unjust for Government to invest the movement with a wider political significance which it does not bear."

The report appealed to leaders of all schools of political thinking, ranged the sympathy of the few remaining waverers among Indian newspapers definitely on the side of the Satyagrahis, and was instrumental more than anything else in bringing about a consensus of opinion among all circles including the Liberals about the justice of the people's demands and the minimum that was due to them. Mention must here be made of the energy with which Sjt. Manilal Kothari went about interviewing various leaders and acquainting them with all the facts of the case, as also of the happenings in Bardoli. As a result, all these leaders gave public expression to their opinion on this burning question, and rivetted the attention of the nation on it. Pandit Motilal Nehru in a long statement to the press said: "I gather that the Bombay Government is prepared to grant a reinquiry but they insist on the payment of all revenues due under the present assessment before having the inquiry. This is an extraordinary position to take up.

If the assessment is *prima facie* wrong and unjust and merits reconsideration it is absurd and illogical to demand payment of any dues under it." Sir Ali Imam in a press statement averred that a solution of the acute situation in Bardoli could be "achieved by the appointment by the Government of a committee composed of the representatives of both parties." Equally unequivocal and perhaps the most telling, because of its brevity, was the opinion expressed by Sjt. C. Y. Chintamani who put the case on the broad ground of commonsense. "Human nature," he said, "is not so perverse that masses of poor men who have nothing to gain and everything to lose thereby, would have wantonly courted a struggle with a mighty Government whose will is law and whose law is not unoften but a respectable term for their indiscretion." He thought that men courting terrible suffering because of the justice of their case might rightly have demanded a cancellation of the enhancement, but "it is evidence of the strength as well as the moderation of the Bardoli ryots' case that they are content to ask for an independent and disinterested, as distinguished from an official inquiry, instead of demanding a reduction of the assessment outright. And in the same measure it exposes the hollowness and untenability of the Government's position that they hesitate to concede such an inquiry. That the enhanced revenue should first be met by the protesting ryots before there could be an inquiry is a farcical answer on the part of Government." He went a step further and proclaimed that the Bardoli Satyagraha came within the meaning of the term 'constitutional agitation' and that it was not in the least inconsistent with the principles of Liberalism. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru said that in the very interests of

Government's prestige, "it appears to me to be necessary that an independent inquiry should be made not only into the grievances of the people of Bardoli with regard to the enhanced assessment but also the allegations made regarding the methods employed in enforcing payment and dealing with the situation generally." I would make grateful mention here of the late Mr. B. F. Madon who brought to bear his statistical knowledge on the tables compiled by the Settlement Officer, and exposed both the absurdity of those figures and of the conclusions based on them. Belonging as he did to no political party, the justice of the cause drew his sympathy for the people, and when the Bardoli Enquiry was proceeding he even offered to appear as an expert witness before the Enquiry officers.

The Indian press throughout the country had been on the side of the Satyagrahis. Among the Anglo-Indian papers with the exception of the semi-official organ of Bombay most of the outside papers had been either indifferent or silent. But the *Statesman* and the *Pioneer* of Allahabad now broke the ugly tradition of Anglo-Indian press being always on the side of the bureaucracy by supporting the Bardoli Satyagraha. "The main point," said the *Pioneer*, "that must be made, and made without delay, is that no impartial observer of the Bardoli dispute possessed of the plain facts of the case can resist the conclusion that the peasants have got the right on their side and that their claim for an examination of the enhanced assessment by an impartial tribunal is just, reasonable and fair."

It was impossible for any rational Government to be heedless to this evergrowing consensus of opinion. But the Bombay Government still kept on marking time.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SLEEPERS AWAKE

"The existence of a situation unique in the history of British administration that must sooner or later result in bloodshed or abdication by the Government in the taluka."

—*Times of India*

A strange parallelogram of forces was now being enacted in Bardoli.

There were on one side the Government men in charge. Thanks to the great public uproar over the Pathans, they were removed about ten days after the actual orders had been passed for their removal from the headquarters. The actual *japti* operations too seem to have ceased, though the *japti* officers were still on the scene and making their presence felt by now and then rendering account of their booties. The buffaloes they had attached were sold to hirelings, Government peons and such others, for nominal prices, and out of the money realised expenses of their upkeep were deducted on a lavish scale, and the Mamlatdar sent receipts to the peasants for the balance which was credited to the arrears due from them. In some cases the amount thus credited against a buffalo attached and sold did not exceed Rs. 4-8-0. No wonder that the peasants took these receipts as insult

added to injury and contemptuously declined to accept them. The Commissioner Mr. Smart who had not even once visited Bardoli since the beginning of Satyagraha, visited it immediately after the expiry of 19th June — the date after which all confiscations had been threatened to be absolute — in company with Mr. Healy, the newly appointed Special Superintendent of Police, with a view to reconnoitring the area, devising measures to deal with the peasants who had begun sowing operations in spite of the forfeiture notices, and thinking out ways and means for making the repressive measures more effective. A curious method of repression and demoralisation may be mentioned here. In Sarbhon the occupants had already begun the agricultural operations in defiance of the forfeiture notices. The defiance was disconcerting, and so some of these cultivators were notified by the special *japti* officer that "Rs. 3,236-3-1 had been realised from Ghelabhai Paragji, the proprietor of a ginning factory at Navsari, as the proceeds of sale of cotton attached there and appropriated to the payment of arrears of revenue due to the members of the Sarbhon Cotton Society to whom the cotton belonged. They are now at liberty to cultivate their lands." They were surprised at the notice inasmuch as they had received full payment for the cotton they had sold to the Ginning Proprietor! Similarly some villagers in Vankaner and other places were notified that their arrears had been paid up through the recovery of Rs. 73,000 from Naranji Dulabh, proprietor of a ginning factory at Bardoli, who had sold these peasants' cotton through the Cotton Superintendent to two merchants in Surat! This was nothing but criminal misappropriation. Apart from highhandedness and gross injustice of the measure, Government had not even cared to make sure

in either of the two cases as to how much cotton if any had been sold to the factory proprietors by the different agriculturists. The Commissioner and his subordinates were evidently not yet convinced that their methods had failed and they were moving the higher authorities for more powers.

On the other hand were the impartial witnesses, day in and day out pressing for the appointment of a fresh and independent inquiry and the newspapers every day exposing the vicious ways of the men in charge of the administration in Bardoli. There was next the unprecedented public awakening throughout India which showed itself in huge mass meetings and district conferences, in processions organised by students and collections made by men and women and children in every part of the country.

The Bombay youths as we have seen already collected Rs. 25,000 for the Satyagraha Fund. Besides this they helped in spreading an intelligent interest in the movement by meetings and distribution of literature. The Surat and Ahmedabad Youth Leagues followed suit, the latter having collected from amongst themselves over Rs. 1,000. In the villages all classes of people were stirred to their depths. The priestly class proverbially conservative and apathetic to all national movements cast off its prejudices and resolved to contribute their share to the movement. Many of the Talatis who resigned belonged to that class. The Brahmans of Jalalpur, a neighbouring taluka, performed the Maharudra sacrifice for the success of the Bardoli Satyagraha and invited Sjt. Vallabhbhai to attend the final ceremony. On the way he halted at Sisodra, a village of Jalalpur taluka, and was the guest of a Brahman. His good mother had spun the whole morning to celebrate the festive occasion of the

Sardar's arrival, garlanded him with the fresh spun yarn and presented him with an *uparna* (scarf) woven out of her own yarn. The Brahmans who performed the Maharudra gave the right to initiate the *puja* to the highest bidder amongst them, the Brahman who contributed Rs. 101 winning the privilege. At the end of the ceremony this amount with all the money offered by the public, which usually would be distributed amongst the Brahmans, was given away for the Bardoli Satyagraha and Sjt. Vallabhbhai received the blessings of all. The invitation to Sjt. Vallabhbhai who they knew was pledged to the removal of untouchability, and the contribution of their earnings to the Satyagraha movement, indicated the very high water-mark to which public awakening had reached.

The District Conferences in Surat, Broach, Nadiad and Ahmedabad attended by thousands of peasants registered the active support of the districts to the Satyagraha. The Presidents of all, except the Broach Conference were 'outsiders'—Mr. Jairamdas presided at Surat, Mr. Khadilkar at Nadiad, and Mr. Kelkar at Ahmedabad—and they all gave promise of carrying the message of Bardoli to their own provinces. "The revolt," said Mr. Kelkar putting the whole thing in a nutshell, "is, in spirit neither better nor worse than the revolt which any desperate debtor sometimes makes against his creditor. . . . Who can intervene here when Government themselves are landlord creditors?" And the Sardar surpassed himself at each succeeding conference. "Keep quiet and watch with sympathetic interest," he said at Nadiad, "I shall give you the signal when your turn comes. Today the immolation of Bardoli is enough. Out of its ashes will rise numerous Bardolis." And at Broach: "If Government mean to devour the land, I

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A MEETING IN SURAT

p. 232

warn them betimes that the conflagration will spread over the whole Gujarat and they will realise not a farthing in Gujarat next year." "It is a mighty Government, that we are contending against," he said at Ahmedabad, "mightier may-be than even Ravana. But let it understand that even the mighty Ravana with his hordes of Rakshasas could not for twelve long years subject to his will one woman and had to perish in the end. Let the mighty Government remember that it has to crush not one Sita but 80,000 brave pure-hearted peasants." Shrimati Sharda Mehta, the gifted wife of Dr. Sumant Mehta, said describing the spell that the Sardar had cast over the people of Bardoli: "He speaks like one inspired. Every word of his comes from the depth of his heart. The situation before him gives him the language and his earnestness carries his hearers at once to a lofty plane." The Government now saw clearly enough that here was a man they might not ignore any longer.

The rising tide of public awakening combined with Sjt. Munshi's letter to His Excellency the Governor revealing the truth about Bardoli which had created a profound impression aroused many a sleeper from his deep slumbers. One of them was the *Times of India* which found the truth too unpalatable and sent its special correspondent to see if he could make it more palatable. He spent a day in Bardoli and returned with reports which substantially corroborated Sjt. Munshi and showed that the truth was, if possible, even more unpalatable. The reports of this special correspondent were served out to the readers of the paper for three days under these flaming headlines: 'Peasant Rebellion in Bardoli,' 'Bolshevik Regime in Bardoli' and so on. Stripped of all the innuendoes and insinuations made in them, of all the nightmares

and phantoms raised by the writer, and the crooked conclusions that he as Mr. Hyde had drawn, the facts perceived by him as Dr. Jekyll remained and they could not but force themselves on the attention of those who had been watching the struggle with indifference. These were: That Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel had succeeded in completely paralysing the revenue administration of the taluka; that over eighty Patels and a little less than half of the Talatis had resigned, and that those who had not resigned could by no means be said to be loyal to the *Sarkar;* that the people's organisation with its five *ashrams* and *chhavnis* (volunteer camps) was as strong as it could be; that even in the absence of Sjt. Vallabhbhai the Bardoli Ashram was bustling with activity; that the 250 volunteers many of whom had previous experience of jail life as Satyagrahis, were observing excellent discipline, leading a rigorous life, living on simple fare and roughing it; that thanks to the ceaseless propaganda carried on by Sjt. Vallabhbhai few people believed that the increase in land revenue could be maintained by Government; that even 'the devil must get his due' and that what amazed the correspondent was the strange hero-worship of the women for the Sardar; that without doubt the villages had gone through an ordeal, with men, women, and children shut up in their homes, herded with their cattle which with festering sores all over their bodies had changed colour into reddish white, and some o them not even able to stand on their legs.

The correspondent attributed all this suffering to Gandhiji and Sjt. Vallabhbhai who, he said, had perpetrated downright cruelty on men and beasts! But apart from this hypocritical solicitude for their welfare, the trend of the writings could not be mistaken. He definitely warned Government that "Mr. Vallabhbhai is

out to establish a Soviet regime in Bardoli with himself playing the role of Lenin, and so long as Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel's hold on the Bardoli villages lasts there can be no peace." The warning could not even deceive a fool, but it was wired out by Reuter to England with suitable comments. It had the desired effect in awakening the British lion from its slumbers. In the House of Commons Lord Winterton reviewed the Bardoli no-tax campaign in which he said Sjt. Vallabhbhai had achieved 'a measure of success,' but 'law was being enforced against tenants who refused payment.' Men like Sir Michael O'Dwyer fretted and fumed and cried for "a prompt enforcement of the law of conspiracy."

What cables were exchanged between White Hall and Simla and Bombay, what military dispositions were contemplated as a result of the pressure from Whitehall, we cannot say. It may be possible for a future historian who has access to the official archives of the period to throw light on the secret movements of Government during this their time of trial in Bardoli. But even their public movements were enough evidence of their private panic. A number of fresh armed policemen were drafted into the taluka, and though the newly appointed Police Superintendent had to be withdrawn, presumably because he refused to take any panicky measures, there was no mistaking the intentions of the Government. One heard every day of plans and preparations being made for the military occupation of Bardoli.

On the other hand there was some anxiety somewhere to avoid, if possible, a catastrophe. An emergency meeting of the cabinet was held on the return from Ahmedabad of Mr. Rieu, the Revenue Member, who had proceeded there to make personal

investigations, and His Excellency the Governor started on the 13th of July for Simla to consult His Excellency the Viceroy. He had long allowed himself to be guided by men who instead of serving the people had usurped the functions of the master. That was not how he had begun the term of office. When Sir Leslie assumed the reins of office the Borsad Satyagraha was in full swing. He had then lost no time in deputing the then Home Member Sir Maurice Hayward to visit Borsad and to report on the situation. As a result of the visit justice was immediately done. But Bardoli found a different Sir Leslie. Five years of office had been enough to kill all independence and initiative out of him and never did a Governor allow himself to be influenced by the Civil Service as Sir Leslie during the Bardoli campaign. All documents signed by his secretaries and even by himself that have been published by their various recepients bear unmistakable stamp of that influence. 'All inquiries have been made and there is no room for further inquiry,' he was made to say in all his letters. A man of the position of the President of the Assembly invited his attention to Mr. Smart's letter to Dr. Edul Behram, and he simply said he knew of no such letter! He ordered the removal of the Pathans, but the reason for the removal given by the bureacrats around him was that they were no longer necessary. In the same way he decided to go to Simla to take counsel with the Viceroy, but the man who drafted the communique announcing his departure for Simla could not but load that brief document with sophistry and veiled threat. "It is His Excellency's obvious duty to uphold the supremacy of the law, as His Excellency intended to do fully," we are told, but it is also his duty to save

"great hardship and suffering on many persons" and the object of His Excellency's proposal to meet the peasants' representatives at Surat is said to be "that while the position of the Government may be made quite clear and definite, there shall be nothing left undone to remove misunderstanding on either side." The writer might well have saved His Excellency the tergiversation of these statements.

His Excellency thus did go to Simla but the document announcing his departure did not conceal the temper of his Government. Prestige which, as we shall see, loomed large in all the negotiations that took place before the final settlement cast its shade even in this brief communique. It was totally unnecessary to assign reasons for His Excellency the Governor's visit to Simla. They were patent. The Government had once again forgotten that he who excuses himself accuses himself.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RATTLING OF THE SABRE

"What cracker is this same, that deafs our ears
With this abundance of superfluous breath"

— *Shakespeare*

His Excellency the Governor left Simla on the 16th and arrived at Surat on the morning of the 18th of July. The Collector at Surat had already notified to the agriculturists in Bardoli that a dozen of their representatives would be given the liberty to wait on His Excellency if they applied in writing, but no application seems to have been received until the 18th. While His Excellency the Governor was conferring with His Excellency the Viceroy in Simla, Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel was addressing a crowded session of the District Conference at Ahmedabad. It was in the pandal of this conference that Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel received through the Commissioner an invitation from the Governor to meet him at Surat with a dozen representatives of the Bardoli Satyagrahis. Vallabhbhai who had over and over again declared his readiness to respond to an invitation from His Excellency and expressed his desire for a settlement, gladly responded and on the morning of the 18th he waited on His Excellency with Mr. Abbas Tyebji, Mrs. Sharda Mehta, Mrs. Bhaktilaxmi Desai, Miss Mithuben Petit and Sjt. Kalyanji Mehta, as additional representatives of the people.

The conference in the morning extended to about three hours and was in a perfectly cordial spirit. His Excellency had a private talk with Sjt. Vallabhbhai during which he told the latter how His Excellency the Viceroy was also anxious to end the unfortunate situation. There did not seem to be any disagreement on what were considered to be the subordinate points, *viz.*, the restoration of lands, the release of prisoners etc., but the principal point of payment of the enhanced assessment seemed to offer insuperable difficulty. But Rao Bahadur Bhimbhai Naik, who had a talk with His Excellency the Governor in the afternoon, discovered that there were difficulties even about the subordinate points. For instance the "strong men" had advised the Governor that they might afford to restore forfeited lands, but not lands forfeited *and sold*. He therefore requested His Excellency to invite Sjt. Vallabhbhai once again to clear up the misunderstanding, if there was any. Sjt. Vallabhbhai waited on His Excellency once again and talked till late in the evening, only to find that His Excellency was adamant about the payment of the enhanced assessment, or in the alternative payment by a third party, *on behalf of the Satyagrahis* of a deposit equal to the amount of the enhancement. There was difficulty about other points too and seeing that no settlement could be arrived at Sjt. Vallabhbhai took leave of His Excellency, requesting him to provide him with a statement of the terms Government were prepared to offer and promising to send the people's reply as soon as he had conferred with his colleagues. The Government offered the following as the necessary conditions of a comprehensive settlement:

Firstly that either the full assessment shall be paid forthwith or *the difference* between the old and the

new assessment *be paid into the treasury on behalf of the peasants.*

Secondly that the movement to withhold land revenue shall be abandoned.

If these proposals were accepted Government would be prepared to take steps by the establishment of a special inquiry *into the alleged errors of the official calculations of facts,* either by a Revenue officer who had nothing to do with the present case, or by a Revenue officer with a Judicial officer associated with him, it being the duty of the latter to decide any *disputed questions of facts or figures.*

The conditions baffled Gandhiji and many others, as they did Sjt. Vallabhbhai who sent a dignified reply embodying the people's demands. A man not genuinely anxious for a settlement would have spurned this mockery of a peace offer. But Sjt. Vallabhbhai did not want to leave any avenue for a settlement unexplored. He made one more gesture for peace and pleaded with Government in a tone which they might well have copied. The insistence on the deposit of the enhanced part of the assessment, said he, "betrays want of faith in the people's honesty and their leader's honour." He added that the people had deliberately not raised the larger and the more important question of the utter onesidedness and antiquated nature of the Land Revenue Code, but had simply asked for justice within the terms of the Code itself. "If the case for inquiry is granted," said Sjt. Vallabhbhai, "it should follow that

"1. Satyagrahi prisoners are discharged.

"2. Lands forfeited, whether sold or not sold, are restored to lawful occupants.

"3. The bazaar price of the movable property such as buffaloes, wines etc., sold it is

contended for ridiculously low prices, is paid to owners.

"4. All dismissals and other punishments inflicted during the pendency of or arising from the struggle are remitted."

As regards the inquiry Sjt. Vallabhbhai put Government at ease by making it clear that he would be even satisfied with an official inquiry, provided it was open and impartial and of a judicial nature before which the people might appear by counsel if they chose. Sjt. Vallabhbhai repeated his desire not to embarrass or humiliate the Government and to seek every avenue for arriving at a compromise honourable alike to the Government and the people.

The conclusions of the negotiations at Surat found all the sections of the public and practically the whole of the Indian and the Anglo-Indian press on the side of the Satyagrahis. All the Bombay papers with the solitary exception of the *Times of India* were with the Satyagrahis as they had been throughout the campaign. The *Leader* characterised Government terms as a "demand for complete surrender on the part of the Bardoli peasantry," the *New India* (Dr. Besant's paper) suggested constitutional means to make the position clear to Birkenhead "should he continue to be obstinate and perverse," the *Hindu* declared that His Excellency the Governor had thrown away an excellent opportunity for bringing about a settlement, and the *Pioneer* described the Govrenment terms as a case of "putting the cart before the horse."

But undeterred by this unanimous expression of public opinion, Sir Leslie Wilson went on with his work of upholding the law and constitutional Government. On the 23rd of July he opened the Legislative Council

with a speech threatening dire consequences if the members representing the Surat district failed to fulfil his conditons "within fourteen days from today." He chose to confuse the issue while trying to clear it and said that if instead of the issue being the justice or injustice of the reassessment in Bardoli, it was "*Whether the writ of His Majesty the King Emperor is to run in a portion of His Majesty's dominions*," Government was prepared to meet it "with all the power which Government possesses." "If," however, "the only question to be dealt with is the justice or injustice of the reassessment, then Government is prepared to submit the whole case to a full, open and independent inquiry as outlined in the statement which had been published, *after the revenue* now due to Government had been paid and the present agitation entirely ceases." Having laid down these conditions he proceeded to deliver his threat to the members who were the elected representatives of the people in Bardoli:

> "It is, however, my duty to make it clear that if these conditions are not accepted and consequently a settlement is not secured Government will, in order that there shall be full compliance with the law, take what action they consider desirable and necessary and will utilise all the powers at their command to ensure that the statutory authority of Government is maintained in every way."

He indulged in a few platitudes regarding the lawlessness of civil disobedience, and lest his threats should be misunderstood as a basis of compromise, he made it clear that they were put forward as "the definite and final decisions of Government. *They contain certain conditions which must be fulfilled*

before any fresh inquiry can be promised and these conditions cannot be altered."

He knew that he could not threaten the leader of the Satyagrahis into submission. He therefore asked the honourable members concerned "to communicate their decision as to whether or no they, on behalf of their constituents, accept or refuse the conditions which must be fulfilled before a fresh inquiry can be set up, to the honourable the Revenue Member within fourteen days from today." In labouring the point of civil disobedience His Excellency forgot his past, forgot his own graceful act of statesmanship with regard to the Borsad Satyagraha five years ago, when he not only did not enjoin his Home Member to stamp out the movement of lawlessness, but to examine the situation and recognised as a result of the Home Member's inquiries that "a case had been made out for remitting the collection of the extra charge at present involved," *i. e.*, Rs. 2,40,000 *per annum*. But it is possible that five years ago he was master of the situation, while at the time of the present crisis he was speaking to the dictation of his Whitehall masters. For on the very same day that His Excellency delivered this threat, Lord Winterton's statement in the House of Commons was cabled by Reuter to reveal the naked paw and the source of inspiration of Sir Leslie's pronouncement. "If the conditions mentioned by Sir Leslie Wilson in the Bombay Legislative Council today as regards Bardoli are not satisfied, the Bombay Government have full support of the Government of India in enforcing compliance with law and crushing the movement which would clearly then be exposed as one directed to coercing Government and not representing reasonable grievances."

This brutal frankness on the part of the Under-Secretary showed the measure of resentment that the

success of a non-violent movement had produced in the British mind. Sjt. Vallabhbhai had enough reason to congratulate himself in that without a single act of violence on the part of the 80,000 people whom he was leading he had compelled Government to speak out their real objective. He might have chosen to issue an equally emphatic statement in reply to these threatening pronouncements and challenged Government to do their worst and crush the movement if they dared. But his consciousness of his strength was equalled by his humility and in a brief statement to the press he simply contented himself with clearing the issue and with a warning to the people not to be misled by empty phrases or deterred by the threats in the speech:

"I must confess that I was unprepared for the threatening deliverance of His Excellency the Governor. But threats apart, I want to remove the confusion that the speech is consciously or unconsciously intended to create. The Governor says in effect that if civil disobedience is the issue, he is prepared to meet it with all the power which Government possesses, but 'if the only question to be dealt with is the justice or injustice of the reassessment, then Government is prepared to submit the whole case after the revenue now due to the Government has been paid and the present agitation ceases, to a full, open and independent inquiry as outlined in the statement which has been published.' I venture to point out that civil disobedience had never been the issue. I know that there is no unanimity of opinion amongst all parties about the wisdom or legitimacy of civil disobedience. I have my own opinion which I hold strongly about it. But the Bardoli people are not

fighting in order to have the right of civil disobedience vindicated. They are fighting by way of civil disobedience — or whatever name the method adopted may be given — in order to induce the Government either to waive the enhancement, or if they are not convinced that the enhancement is improperly made, to appoint an impartial, independent inquiry to find out the truth. The only question therefore is that of justice or injustice of the reassessment. And if the Government are prepared to have that question examined by a 'full, open and independent inquiry,' they must surely accept the logical consequence of the proposition they themselves lay down, namely, not to insist upon the payment of the enhancement which is in dispute and to restore the people to the condition they occupied before the struggle commenced. I warn the public also about the qualifying clause that is attached to 'the full, open and independent inquiry,' *viz.*, 'as outlined in the statement which has been published.' This is a dangerous clause. For what is promised in the Surat communication is not 'a full, open and independent inquiry,' but a mockery of it. The Surat statement contemplates a very limited inquiry to be conducted by a revenue officer assisted by a judicial officer to investigate 'errors of calculation and fact,' a totally different thing from 'a full, open and independent inquiry.' I hope therefore that undeterred by the threats contained in the Governor's deliverance, public opinion will concentrate only on the one point that I have mentioned."

What the student of Satyagraha has to learn from the document is that even in time of provocative crisis

a Satyagrahi cannot afford to lose his balance of mind. He deliberately eschews strong and irritating language and he studiously refrains from emulating the minatory tone of his opponent. An equally instructive study in Satyagraha is an appeal to Government which Gandhiji published in *Young India* on the eve of the Governor's pronouncement, regardless of the possibility or otherwise of its being minatory in tone, and irrespective of the probability that the appeal would fall on deaf ears:

"The offer made at Surat is less than what according to reliable rumour had been offered privately. The conditions named by Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel have been the conditions always contemplated by him and in various ways conveyed to the Government. He has asked for nothing that has not always been done in honourable settlements. If it is acknowledged, as it has been acknowledged even in unexpected quarters, that the people of Bardoli and Valod have undergone terrible sufferings for the sake of what to them is a matter of principle, they have not done so merely to have an inquiry by a subordinate revenue official into individual cases which the inquiry proposed by the Government amounts to in fact; nor can the people be expected to forego valuable land which they contend has been wrongly forfeited; nor yet can they as honourable men and women leave in the lurch those who have been wrongly made to suffer. The Government offer means that although the people have done wrong in refusing payment of the enhancement, they would graciously reopen individual cases if the people will cease to do wrong and if they will deposit the very amount which they say

is wrongly imposed on them. This is a position which no leader worth the name can possibly subscribe to, when he has no conviction of such wrong on the part of the people, and when on the contrary he has the deep conviction that the people are altogether in the right and the Government hopelessly in the wrong.

"But Sjt. Vallabhbhai does not make, like the Government, impossible conditions. He does not ask the Government to own themselves to be in the wrong. His letter reduced to one sentence asks the Government to refer the question of right or wrong to a committee of the Government's choice with the only reasonable proviso that it will adequately represent the people. And in making his counter proposal he asks the Government to recognise the natural and logical consequence of such an impartial committee, *viz.*, to revert to the *status quo ante bellum*. I venture to suggest that he would be guilty of a gross breach of trust if he asked for or took less. In his proposal there is no humiliation intended or implied of the Government. His reasonableness and anxiety to come to any honourable compromise limits him to the barest minimum. For it is surely open to him to raise the whole question of the revenue policy of the Government and ask for damages for the terrible losses suffered by the people during the past four months without any fault of theirs.

"Two courses are open to the Government either to bow to the public opinion of all India and accept Sjt. Vallabhbhai's offer or in order to uphold a false prestige to reassert the doctrine of frightfulness. If it is not too late, I appeal to the Bombay Government to take the way of truth."

CHAPTER XXIX

SAFE IN GOD'S HANDS

"Our soul waiteth for the Lord; He is our help and our shield."

— *Ps. 33, 20*

The days following the sabre-rattling were days of intense excitement outside Bardoli. The fateful pronouncements of the Governor and the Under-Secretary of State created outside Bardoli consternation in some quarters and fear in others. The members to whom the ultimatum was addressed were certainly taken by surprise. The straightest course for them was to tell Sir Leslie Wilson in as few words as possible that they could not undertake to fulfil the conditions on behalf of their constituents, simply because, as His Excellency the Governor should have known full well, they were bound to stand by the people in their resolve, especially after they had been re-elected on the Bardoli issue. But instead of their sending a straight reply the Coalition Nationalist Party prepared a manifesto and published it over the signatures of about 50 members of the Legislative Council. The manifesto emphatically protested "against the attempts made in His Excellency's speech to treat as a lawless activity a peaceful and constitutional movement like the Bardoli Satyagraha," and regretted

that "His Excellency should have at this stage attempted to fasten the responsibility arising out of such an ultimatum on the elected members of the Council and particularly the members from the Surat district, whose earlier attempts at securing a settlement were unheeded," and stated that in case of "any precipitation of a conflict between the executive and people the responsibility of its consequences will lie entirely with the executive." It was a good protest, but it might have been better. They might have told the Government in the plainest possible terms that if they wanted the Satyagraha to cease they must treat directly with its author. But that is perhaps asking too much of a body constituted as our Legislative Councils are.

The extreme section of the outside public hailed the pronouncements with delight in that an opportunity had arrived for Satyagraha to be put to the highest test and therethrough for launching the larger fight for Swaraj. The desire found expression in an open letter addressed to Gandhiji by Sardar Shardul Singh Kaveeshwar, the Sikh leader, advising Gandhiji to invite sympathetic civil disobedience throughout the country as Sjt. Vallabhbhai's tendency to keep the Satyagraha isolated seemed to him "to go beyond the limits of practical politics."

There was on the other hand the timid section of the public. They regarded the Governor's pronouncement as portentous and though they had been supporting the movement throughout and admitting the justice of the people's demand they seemed to fight shy of the impending catastrophe. A prominent exponent of the view was a well-known publicist in Bombay, editing a daily and a weekly, who though admitting that Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel was perfectly right in declaring that civil disobedience was not the

issue, felt that Sir Leslie Wilson was justified in his apprehensions, and advised Sjt. Vallabhbhai to accept the terms offered by His Excellency. Citing an entirely inapplicable South African parallel, he asked Sjt. Vallabhbhai to "suspend the movement for the time being" as the Government "at present are much harassed by the strikers and the general industrial disorganisation in the country." This was what he suggested in his daily paper, but his weekly journal amply showed that he was not so much disturbed by the possible embarrassment of the Government as the ultimate outcome of the impasse being martial law and all it meant. Whilst he one day commended Sjt. Vallabhbhai's self-restraint the next he advised him not to confound courage with foolhardiness and suggested that the people would have nothing to lose and much to gain by accepting the condition of abject surrender!

But the peasants over whom hell threatened to be let loose quietly pursued their agricultural operations, unmindful of the threat and the prudent advice. In an article in *Young India* Gandhiji warned both the impatient extremists and those interested in compromises to do nothing in a hurry, as the people of Bardoli "were safe in the hands of God:"

"I do not know what Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel would say to the (Sikh) Sardar's suggestion but I can say, 'Not yet.' Time has not come even for limited sympathetic Satyagraha. Bardoli has still to prove its mettle. If it can stand the last heat and if the Government go to the farthest limit, nothing that I or Sjt. Vallabhbhai can do will stop the spread of Satyagraha or limit the issue to a *bona fide* re-inquiry and its logical consequences. The limit will then be prescribed by the capacity of

India as a whole for self-sacrifice and self-suffering. If that manifestation is to come it will be natural and incapable of being stayed by any agency no matter how powerful. But so far as I understand the spirit of Satyagraha and its working, it is the duty of Sjt. Vallabhbhai and myself to keep to the original limits in spite of the Government provocations which are strong enough even as they are to warrant the crossing of the original boundary.

"The fact is that Satyagraha pre-supposes the living presence and guidance of God. The leader depends not on his own strength but on that of God. He acts as the Voice within guides him. Very often therefore what are practical politics so-called are unrealities to him, though in the end his prove to be the most practical politics. All this may sound foolish and visionary on the eve of what bids fair to become the toughest battle that India has hitherto had to face. But I would be untrue to the nation and myself if I failed to say what I feel to be the deepest truth. If the people of Bardoli are what Vallabhbhai believes them to be, all will be well, in spite of the use of all the weapons that the Government may have at its command. Let us wait and see. Only let the M.L.C.'s and others who are interested in compromises not take a single weak step in the hope of saving the people of Bardoli. They are safe in the hands of God."

With a little more patience and a little more grit the Council members might have allowed things to take their course. The heavens would not have come down if they had given no more reply to the Governor beyond the obvious one we have indicated. In fact Government were themselves preparing the

ground for a settlement. Soon after His Excellency the Governor's speech in the Council Sjt. Ramchandra Bhatta, a resident of Mota in Bardoli taluka, and carrying on business in Bombay, made an offer to Government to deposit the difference between the old assessment and the new. Though he first received a reply that his offer must come through the Surat members, it was subsequently accepted, as from himself, and subsequent circumstances indeed justify the presumption that Sjt. Ramchandra's move was inspired by Government agency. Whatever may be the case, the M.L.C.'s could not shake off anxiety from their minds. They interviewed the Governor and the members of Government, who had the same terms to give them. Sjt. Munshi, who had been consulting with Sir Chunilal Mehta (the Finance Member), rightly thought the better thing was to ascertain the minimum from Gandhiji and Sjt. Vallabhbhai. He therefore interviewed them and they gladly gave him the following terms :

1. Pending the inquiry the old assessment to be accepted.

2. Satyagrahis to pay the old assessmnnt and to call off the campaign on the inquiry being announced.

3. Enquiry to be an open judicial enquiry, by a judicial officer alone or assisted by a revenue officer with terms of reference as given below and under which the people will have a right to lead and test evidence with the help of counsel if necessary.

Terms of reference :

Firstly :

To inquire into and report upon the complaint of the people of Bardoli and Valod (a) that the enhancement of revenue recently made is not warranted in terms of the Land Revenue Code; (b)

that the report and the notifications accessible to the public do not contain sufficient data warranting the enhancement and that ome of the data given are wrong;

And to find that if the people's complaint is held to be justified, what enhancement or reduction, if any, there should be upon the old assessment.

and

Secondly:

To report upon the allegations made by or on behalf of the people about the coercive measures adopted by the Government in order to collect the enhanced revenue.

4. All lands to be restored.

5. All Satyagrahi prisoners to be released.

6. All Talatis and Patels to be reinstated.

7. Valod liquor shop-keeper to be compensated.

Gandhiji gave Sjt. Munshi to understand that if the demand for an inquiry into the coercive measures was regarded as a hitch in the settlement, the Satyagrahis would willingly waive the demand.

With these terms Sjt. Munshi waited upon His Excellency the Governor who gave him the cold shoulder. Soon after this two other members of the Council, Sjts. Haribhai Amin and Nariman went to Sabarmati to interview Gandhiji. He had the same reply to give them as he had given to Sjt. Munshi. The only thing that might be waived, he reiterated to them, was the demand for an inquiry into the coercive measures. Gandhiji also gave them the assurance that Sjt. Vallbhbhai would have no hesitation to go to Poona if the members wanted him there to arrange a settlement on the minimum terms he had given.

In Bardoli, as I have said before, all was peaceful. The Sardar's arrest was regarded everywhere as a

foregone conclusion, and rather than succeed him after he was taken away, Gandhiji thought it better to anticipate the Government and to go to Bardoli ready to do what the Sardar wanted him to do. Accordingly he moved to Bardoli on the 2nd of August. It was an agreeable surprise to him to discover that while there was tense excitement in the country over the fate of Bardoli, in Bardoli itself there seemed to be nothing unusual. A couple of days in the midst of them was enough to convince him that he was perfectly right in having described them as "safe in the hands of God." On the day of his arrival in Bardoli peasants from various places came wading through water and mire to pay their respects to Gandhiji. They knew that there were talks of a compromise in the air. So one of them on behalf of the rest said to Gandhiji: "We have surrendered our heads to the Sardar, not our honour (lit. noses)." "Then you may be sure that your honour is safe," said Gandhiji. "But a greater test is still to come," he added. "When you have stood the final heat, victory is yours. But tell me one thing. Supposing Vallabhbhai is taken away and others also with him, won't you be cowed down?" "No fear," said one of them with firmness. "Vallabhbhai Saheb has done enough to turn our iron into steel, and we know that the only thing we have to do is to be true to our word, even if the very heavens fall." Gandhiji was delighted. Some friend suggested that he should visit some of the villages. "Not unless Vallabhbhai wants me to do so," was the reply. It was only at Vallabhbhai's desire that Gandhiji visited Sarbhon and Rayam and met there hundreds of peasants from scores of villages in the vicinity. The simple, innocent villagers whose fame had spread beyond the

seas as rebels and peasants in revolt were all there quite unconscious of the stir they had created in high quarters. The gathering at Rayam was very large, there were men from many villages all waiting in the sun, a nice spinning demonstration, hundreds of women and a stream of them laying their contributions at his feet. It was necessary for Gandhiji to make a speech if only by way of excusing himself. He did not need to tell them what had been happening outside, nor did he need to warn them of the impending storm. He simply described to them the sovereign virtue of discipline. "I cannot speak as the order of the Sardar is clear," he said. "If he had been here and asked me to speak I should have done so. But today I cannot do anything more than congratulate you on your bravery and on your unity. I was glad to see the spinning demonstration, but I cannot even speak about charkha. It should be a principle with us implicity to obey the commands or instructions of one whom we have chosen to be our Sardar. I admit I am Vallabhbhai's elder brother, but in public life no matter whether one is father or elder brother of the man under whom one serves, one must obey his instructions. It is not a new law. It used to be a law even in ancient times. It was that spirit of discipline which made such a mighty personality as Lord Krishna humbly serve as Arjun's charioteer and serve as the meanest of the menials on the occasion of King Yudhishthira's Rajsuya sacrifice. I cannot therefore do anything more thanc ongratulate you. It was Vallabhbhai who made you famous throughout India. But it is Government who made you famous throughout the world. May you achieve even greater things in future."

CHAPTER XXX

TRIUMPH OF SATYAGRAHA

"I have found the art of deceiving diplomats. I speak the truth."

—*Cavour*

WHILST Gandhiji had thus quietly settled down in Bardoli, Sjt. Vallabhbhai received a telegram from Rao Saheb Dadubhai Desai who invited him to Poona on behalf of the Gujarat members. The invitation was telegraphed with the consent of Sir Chunilal Mehta, the Senior Member of the Governor's Council, if not at his instance, as one may safely presume from the fact that Sjt. Vallabhbhai was by the same telegram invited to be Sir Chunilal's guest. If only to please the Gujarat members Sjt. Vallabhbhai responded to the invitation and reached Poona on the 3rd August.

It is hardly possible, or proper, even if it were possible, to disclose all that happened between Sir Chunilal and Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel on the 3rd and the 4th. But the bare facts must in fairness to all concerned be disclosed. Government had realised that though they had addressed the ultimatum to the Surat members, it had ultimately to treat with Sjt. Vallabh-bhai. Let it be said to the credit of the Surat

members, as of all the other members with whom they were acting, that they refused until the last to give any undertaking or to commit Sjt. Vallabhbhai in any way. While informal discussions were going on at Sir Chunilal's place it was felt that Government were no less for a settlement than were the Surat members, but every one seemed to be at a loss to hit upon a formula that would preserve Government's prestige. A colourless draft was framed but it was not acceptable to Sir Chunilal Mehta. He had been discussing with other members of Government and it was in the evening that he came with the draft of a letter to be addressed by the Surat members to the Revenue Member:

"*We are glad to be able to say that we are in a position to inform Government that the conditions laid down by His Excellency the Governor in his opening speech to the Council dated 23rd July will be fulfilled.*"

"What" wondered Sjt. Vallabhbhai, "can be the meaning of the M. L. C.'s signing the letter saying that the conditions *will* be fulfilled, when they have to fulful the conditions *before* any inquiry is granted? And if any one can fulfil the conditions it is we, and we say that it is impossible for us to pay even the *old* assessment *until after* the inquiry is announced."

"That is not your concern," said Sir Chunilal. "If the members are agreeable to addressing the letter, you need not worry as to *how*, *when* and *by whom* the conditions will be fulfilled. You will pay the old assessment *after* the inquiry is announced."

Frankly this diplomacy was beyond our wits. Sjt. Munshi who was with the Sardar throughout those fateful hours, and Sjt. Shivdasani, submitted alternative drafts which were unacceptable to

Sir Chunilal Mehta who swore by the Government draft. Fearing that there would again be an impasse Sjt. Munshi started discussing the other conditions. As a result of this discussion, agreement could be reached, at a very late hour in the night, about those other conditions, *e.g.*, restoration of lands, release of prisoners, and reinstatement of the Talatis. It is needless to add that Sjt. Vallabhbhai waived the clause about indemnity if there was agreement on all the other points. But *the* main point was the draft, and Sjt. Munshi left at a late hour, hoping that we might be able to arrive at some satisfactory formula. Swami Anand and I happened to be with Sjt. Vallabhbhai during those anxious hours. Sir Chunilal saw no less than we that agreement was impossible and negotiations must break down and he retired sorely disappointed. Until the small hours of the morning we sat discussing the draft of a letter to be sent to His Excellency the Governor explaining why the negotiations had to break down. We prepared a draft and then retired to rest our tired limbs. In about two hours I got up still thinking of Sir Chunilal's formula. I woke up Sjt. Vallabhbhai and said: "After all, Vallabhbhai, it is an innocuous, if meaningless, formula. We give no undertaking, nor do the Surat members give any. If Government must have that meaningless formula, we can afford to give that sop to Cerberus."

"But it is a compromise with truth," said Sjt Vallabhbhai.

"I agree," said I, "but it is a compromise on the part of Government."

"But won't we be party to it?"

"No," said I. "*Not* if we plainly tell Government what they are doing."

"Well, then, are you prepared to tell Sir Chunilal that Government are compromising with truth ?"

"Certainly. I will do so forthwith."

"But, look here," said Sjt Vallabhbhai, "I frankly do not see this game. Why don't they face facts? What do you think Bapu would say ? What do you say, Swami ?"

Never was the Sardar higher in my estimation than that day. His anxiety to have the opinion of humble companions like Swami and myself seemed to be as great as his anxiety to find out what 'Bapu' (Gandhiji) would think of his attitude.

Thus fortified in his own conviction which was clear that there was neither compromise of truth or of the principle of the Master on *our* part, he said: "But will the Surat members sign this meaningless formula ?"

"I dare say," said I. "They also must see through the game, and Sir Chunilal seemed to be sure that they should have no objection to subscribing to that formula."

"Well then," said the Sardar, "if they sign it, I should have no objection. But we should make our position once again clear to Sir Chunilal and tell him plainly that Government are compromising with truth."

I went to Sir Chunilal and explained to him the whole thing. "It is well that you make your position clear. I shall make it all clear to Government," he said. As we were discussing the thing, Sjt. Vallabhbhai looked in, again emphasised the point of compromise and expressed his fear that Government might not after all be prepared to accept the 'information' that the proposed letter sought to convey. The draft was too good or too bad for Government to accept. But Sir Chunilal seemed to have no doubt. Well, the ways

of Governments are inscrutable, and the moment Sjt. Vallabhbhai said that if the Surat members had no objection to signing the document, he would have none, the settlement was complete. Let it be said in jnstice to Sir Chunilal Mehta that he knew the mind of Government better than any one of us and his patriotism had, at this great moment, got the better of his officialdom. He knew that he was serving the cause of his country and he did not seem to mind that Government of which he was a member would ultimately be discovered to be clutching at the shadow of prestige. It was the way of Governments all the world over.*

But if the Government were content to be satisfied with clutching at the shadow of prestige, Sjt. Vallabhbhai could not be content without the substance. All that he wanted was a full, independent, judicial inquiry and a restoration of the *status quo*. Government were perfectly agreeable, provided here too they could have their prestige intact. The inquiry in the very words suggested by Sjt. Vallabhbhai including an unconscious grammatical slip — minus the clause about coercive

* It is hardly pleasant to have to narrate these negotiations in so much detail. But the Government's later declarations, and those of the *Times of India* which in this matter beat all its previous records of mendacity, compel me to reveal the whole story. Here is an instance from the *Times of India* Year Book for 1929: "The peasants of Bardoli, refusing to pay the land tax on a new assessment, and at the instigation of some politicsl leaders, defying constituted authority, at least (last?) received an ultimatum from the Government which compelled them to make a timely surrender." The new Governor, in his speech this year on the results of the Bardoli Enquiry, seemed to endorse this shameless swaggar. The Enquiry, he said, was given in response to the undertaking given by the Surat Members! It is right therefore that the world should know the truth about this 'undertaking' and the 'timely surrender.'

M. D.

measures — was to be announced immediately the members had addressed that diplomatic letter, and the restorative measures would be taken on the members writing a formal letter to the Revenue Member to reinstate the Talatis, to restore the lands, and to release the prisoners. The compensation clause cancelling all penalties and compensating the Valod liquor seller was not to be included in the letter, as the thing would be done by executive orders. For Sjt. Vallabhbhai nothing more was necessary. He was there to win the substance and not the shadow and he had done so fully and entirely.

The rest of the story is briefly told. The letter was signed by the Surat members and three or four more, for what reason it is difficult to say. At the same time at the instance of Sir Chunilal Mehta, Rao Bahadur Bhimbhai Naik, Sjt. K. M. Munshi and several others went to Surat to cooperate with the Collector in getting all sold lands re-transferred to the original owners. The purchasers of these lands were few and far between, but they had to be hunted out in time so that the transaction might be complete before the fateful 6th of August had expired. The old Collector Mr. Hartshorn who had often declared that sold lands would never be restored had been conveniently transferred at the moment, and the new Collector Mr. Garrett ultimately persuaded the purchasers to return the lands. Of course they had been given all sorts of stupid promises by the Commissioner and the Collector, and it was not quite an easy job to make them disgorge the illgotten gains. Sjt. Munshi gave in a private letter an amusing account of how cleverly the Collector had managed these friends. On the same day as the letter was sent to the Revenue Member the inquiry was announced exactly

in the terms the Satyagrahis had suggested, and on the M. L. C.'s writing to the Revenue member about the restoration clauses Government announced that orders would be passed to restore all lands, release all prisoners and reinstate the Talatis if they applied in the proper form. Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel had now no other alternative but to express his satisfaction with what Government had done and he publicly thanked all concerned including Government. He further issued instructions to the peasants in which he told them: "Now we have to pay up the old assessment, not the enhanced one. I hope you will keep yourselves in readiness to pay the old assessment." He wrote this obviously in anticipation of the prisoners' release and was amazed that the release had not yet been announced. But this was because the Government were yet in doubt that Sjt. Vallabhbhai had accepted the Settlement as satisfactory to himself and the Satyagrahis, and they deputed the Collector to ascertain the fact. On Sjt. Vallabhbhai telling him that he had already expressed his satisfaction in a Gujarati bulletin addressed to the peasants, the Collector wired to the Government to correct the misunderstanding and the next morning all the prisoners were released. As to the Talatis the application for reinstatement drafted by Sjt. Vallabhbhai was quite acceptable to the Collector and he immediately issued orders to take them back. This done it was for the people to fulfil their part of the contract. They soon began to pay the old assessment and in about a month's time there were no arrears of revenue.

Thus ended a campaign which was pursued by a peaceful peasantry with truth and patient suffering for their weapons against an enemy who could any day have crushed them to atoms. But the Bardoli peasants

demonstrated to all the world that truth and non-violence cannot be crushed. The Bardoli Settlement was a triumph of truth and non-violence, the third of the Sardar's successful campaigns, the third milestone that he has had the honour of laying on the road to Swaraj. The Nagpur victory was the vindication of a technical right. The Borsad victory, won after a very short and swift campaign, only redressed a local grievance, and though no victory could have been more signal and decisive, the campaign because of its swiftness failed to draw the nation's attention to the extent that the Bardoli campaign had drawn. The Bardoli triumph was unique in that it compelled not only the nation's but the whole Empire's attention, and the justice and moderation of the people's demand won practically the nation's sympthy. It was unique in that it was fought by perhaps one of the meekest of the talukas in India, in that it affected the Revenue Department, whose dispositions it was up to now believed not even the gods may question, and in that it compelled a mighty Government pledged to crush the movement to yield within a fortnight of the pledge. It was unique in that the leader of the campaign shed all idea of personal prestige, and also in that the Governor of the province, who for a moment seemed to listen to dictation from Whitehall, did all that he personally could to bring about peace. Even the camouflage that he seems to have consented to was in the worthy cause of peace. That is why Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai emphasised in their speeches throughout the week after the Settlement the duty of congratulating the Governor as much as that of congratulating those who had won the campaign.

CHAPTER XXXI

CHORUS OF APPLAUSE

"I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none."

— *Shakespeare*

AS soon as the news of the settlement was flashed over the country the Sardar was the recipient of numerous telegrams of congratulations and the press all over the country was full of laudatory articles. It is impossible here to refer to them all, but a few representative and typical opinions about the termination of the struggle may be reproduced.

I take those of the prominent leaders. Shrimati Sarojini Naidu's tribute deserves the first place in the little garland of flowers that I propose to string together here. In the course of a letter to Gandhiji she wrote:

"What poignant vigils does the night witness, that the world never knows? How many such poignant vigils have the people of Bardoli kept night after night? . . . But I rejoice that to night the darkness will bring dreams of sweetness to those whose spirit was so unwearied in battle through long and terrible weeks. . . . The sleep of a Satyagrahi when his work is over is

indeed a gift of the gods. Do you remember the words of the German philosopher: "Let your work be a battle, let your peace be a victory." So it has been at Bardoli. The peace has indeed been a victory of peace and peaceful ways.

"I had just finished the last page of the English version of your moving and vivid history of the South African Satyagraha when the post brought the papers with the longed for and joyful news of the Bardoli settlement . . . honourable to both sides. As I wrote to 'Sardar' Vallabhbhai a month ago, I have always felt and known that Satyagraha in its deep authentic sense is literally 'the treasure of the lowly' — Maeterlinck's beautiful phrase — of those who are content with realities and not seekers after false values and false standards. . . . Your dream was to make Bardoli the perfect example of Satyagraha. Bardoli has fulfilled itself in its own fashion interpreting and perfecting your dream."

Gandhiji, who was in Bardoli at the moment, tendered in the columns of *Young India* his congratulations both to the Government of Bombay and the people of Bardoli and Sjt. Vallabhbhai "without whose firmness as well as gentleness the settlement would have been impossible." "The reader will note," he added, "that the Satyagrahis have achieved practically all that they had asked for. The terms of reference to the Committee of inquiry are all that could he desired. True, there is to be no inquiry into the allegations about the coercive measures adopted by the Government to enforce payment. But it was generous on the part of Sjt. Vallabhbhai to waive the condition, seeing that the lands forfeited, including lands sold, are to be

restored, the Talatis are to be reinstated and other minor matters are to be attended to." The late Lala Lajpat Rai writing in the *People* wrote:

"The settlement of the Bardoli dispute between the Government and the cultivators of Bardoli is a notable triumph of the popular cause, but it is creditable to Government as well. It is a moral victory for truth and justice, and conclusively shows that Government *is* susceptible to the pressure of public opinion if properly organised and backed by the sanction of a contingency which may lead to unpleasant results. Determined and organised agitation accompanied by readiness to sacrifice and suffer does tell in the long run."

Dr. Besant, whose views about civil disobedience are well known, congratulated the Bardoli peasants from many a public platform.

Pandit Motilal Nehru congratulated Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai on the "splendid triumph."

Sjt. C. Rajagopalachari wrote:

"It is really a wonderful victory and I am glad it was concluded in the way it was done. As Gandhiji has written there is heavy work yet to be done. I hope the peasants will get relief at the end of it. But the national and moral victory had already been got. Vallabhbhai's part in Indian history has been great."

Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviyaji congratulating Sjt. Vallabhbhai said:

"The first signal triumph of Satyagraha was in Champaran. The second and an equally great triumph has been in Bardoli."

Maulana Shaukatali and Shuib Quereshi wired congratulations to "our brave brothers, their Sardar and co-workers."

Sjt. K. M. Munshi telegraphed: "Congratulations for the most brilliant triumph in the history of Indian public life."

Sjt. Satyamurti wired: "Heartiest congratulations. You have pioneered the only way to Swaraj."

Sjt. Subhas Bose wired: "All India rejoices with you on glorious victory. All honour to Satyagrahis and their leader."

Mr Richard Gregg in a letter to Gandhiji said:

"Heartiest congratulations to the Bardoli peasants, to you and Vallabhbhai Patel. It has been a superb struggle and will be a telling example to the whole country in methods and tactics. It was a heavy price to pay, but the results of the victory are worth far more than the cost of suffering. It will I think sweep through the peasants' veins like wine — if you don't object to the simile."

Sir Lalubhai Samaldas in a special article in the *Indian National Herald* wrote:

"The sufferings that the people of the taluka have gone through without a single case of violence have evoked the wonder and admiration not only throughout the country but outside India. I was one of those who did not believe that the people will put up with all the troubles without getting excited and without hitting back. When I expressed my doubts to some of the elders of the movement, I was assured by them, especially by Mahadev Desai that so long as Vallabhbhai had control of the movement there was no fear of violence being committed by the riots. I am free to acknowledge that I was mistaken in my view of the capacity of the people to carry on the passive resistance movement to a successful issue . . . No one but Vallabhbhai could have

succeeded in such a fight. He won the confidence of the people to an extent that hardly any other leader would have been able to win. The ryots too were equally patient and forbearing and entirely amenable to the disciplinary orders of their leader."

In the course of a memorable letter dated Johannesburg, 7th September 1928, addressed to Gandhiji, the Rt. Hon. Srinivas Sastri wrote:

"First allow me to say how happy I was to hear of the end of the Bardoli affair. It does honour to all parties concerned. Vallabhbhai Petel has risen to the highest rank. I bow to him in reverence. His brother too behaved nobly. Let us not foget the Governor. His difficulties must have been great. How few of us realise the limitations and shackles under which these high functionaries work? It is not possible for them to give play to their humanity, so completely is it submerged in their office and the traditions pertaining to it. Righteousness is a virtue which half the official world is afraid of and the other half pays a distant homage to.

I don't speak of your part in it, for you chose to remain outwardly apart and won't like that any one should consider you as coming for a share of the glory. Like unto God, who according to some philosophers has started the inexorable wheel of *samsara* and seems no longer necessary (and yet) He is the indispensable condition of its life, so have you been the invisible guide and vivifying example, active in the hearts of all and keeping them in the straight path. Certainly you don't divide the glory with them. Yours is of a different order, incapable of being shared even as it cannot be put aside."

POSTSCRIPT

NO one who has read the foregoing chapters will doubt that the Bardoli Settlement was wrung out of unwilling hands. The Government yielded, not because it saw the justice of the people's demand but because it could not persist any longer in its methods. Writing in the middle of August, 1928 in *Young India* Gandhiji missed anything like a change of the heart in the Civil Service after the Settlement. "What one is told and observes" said he, "is that the Civil Service is not satisfied with the settlement. If it was satisfied the persistent campaign of lies carried about the Sardar and his doings would have stopped."* In fact far from showing any signs of abatement, about two months after these words were written the veracious paper speaking for Government published an article from its special correspondent with the headline

*Indeed when eight months hence the Committee had found that the people's complaints were fully justified, and that gross injustice had been done to them, the Revenue Member had the hardihood to say that Government had accepted the report in order to close the matter, though it could draw conclusions just opposite of what the Committee had drawn on the data collected and accepted by them. This is why exactly a year after we find Gandhiji condemning the Government as "incurable" (*Young India*, 8th August 1929) and incapable of rendering justice for its own sake. M. D.

'Menace of Bardoli' which was from beginning to end a issue of lies. Without having been to Bardoli, he wrote that Sjt. Vallabhbhai maintained the Satyagraha organisation in Bardoli at full strength, that the Sardar did not believe that peace had been concluded, that he and his lieutenants were busy collecting evidence for the Committee and that they were not keen on allowing too many ryots to appear at the inquiry so as not to risk contradictory statements — all palpable falsehoods, as Sjt. Vallabhbhai who had been away from Bardoli most of the time after the settlement, had no difficulty in showing. Sjt. Vallabhbhai's contradiction was published by the paper, without of course a word of apology, but the falsehoods were duly wired to its London namesake without the contradiction. And all this on the eve of the announcement of the personnel of the Bardoli Enquiry Committee:

Sjt. Vallabhbhai immediately saw through these attempts at prejudicing the Enquiry and opened correspondence with the Revenue Member of the Government regarding the personnel of the Committee they proposed to appoint. Throughout the negotiations, he wrote, he had been given to understand, and all the intermediaries to the settlement confirmed the impression, that Mr. Davis of the Judicial Service whose name had Sjt. Vallabhbhai's approval was to be the Judicial officer on the Committee. Government categorically repudiated any such undertaking, and announced the appointment of Messrs. Broomfield and Maxwell, but the Revenue Member wired to Sjt. Vallabhbhai that if he went over to Poona he would gladly explain the circumstances which precluded the appointment of Mr. Davis. Sjt. Vallabhbhai availed himself of this opportunity, not so much

to understand Government position, as to seek satisfaction on a matter which had been hanging fire ever since the settlement. When the terms of the settlement were arrived at there were certain matters which were understood as between Sji. Vallabhbhai and Sir Chunilal Mehta, and others which followed from the settlement as a necessary corollary. Amongst the first was Mr. Davis' appointment, amongst the second there was the remission of all penalties imposed during the Satyagraha on account of the peasants' refusal to pay the assessment. Whilst the prisoners were released, and the forfeited licences were restored, the *chothai* or the 25 per cent. penalties recovered from Satyagrahis whose moveables had been distrained and sold were not remitted. It is perfectly obvious that if the Satyagrahis whose movables could not be attached had to pay only the old assessment, those who had been victims of the distraint processes should not have the penalties imposed on them in addition. The saddar part of the affair was that even those who had not joined the Satyagraha movement, but had sat on the fence and paid the assessment a little late had to pay the penalties! Sjt. Vallabhbhai felt very strongly that even if he might waive his objection to the personnel of the committee, this was a matter which could by no means be given up. When therefore the Revenue Member explained to him Government's inability to appoint Mr. Davis, he said he was prepared to forgo his insistence on his appointment not because he appreciated the argument, but because he could understand the Government's difficulty in re-opening the matter after having already announced the personnel. But as regards the *chothai* penalties he said it would be nothing short of a scandal if they were not

remitted. Government's refusal to remit them would raise grave suspicions about their *bona fides* and the Satyagrahis would have nothing to do with the committee if Government were not prepared to carry out what logically followed from the settlement. The Revenue Member was adamant and seemed to be prepared to face a catastrophe if the worst came to the worst. Sjt. Vallabhbhai left him at that and was preparing to leave Poona when the Revenue Member came running to Sjt. Vallabhbhai's place to say that he had had a talk with His Excellency the Governor who felt that the matter of remission of penalties was a minor one and there was no difficulty about it, provided Sjt. Vallabhbhai was prepared to accept the personnel of the Committee. Once again the circumstances proved that while His Excellency the Governor was anxious for peace, his advisers were always opposed to conceding even barest justice and inclined to precipitate war.

So far as the peasants were concerned, their leader had in the prevailing atmosphere of distrust, to take care to warn Government in the last letter that he wrote to the Revenue Member that he accepted the personnel of the Committee on the distinct understanding "that if at any stage of the inquiry I find that the ends of justice are not being fulfilled, or if at the end of the inquiry I find the decision of the Committee is manifestly unwarranted and unjust I reserve myself the liberty to offer battle again."

For to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

The Story of Bardoli

PART II

THE ENQUIRY

The circumstances in which the Enquiry was appointed, and the people agreed to the personnel of the Committee, have been narrated in the last chapters of the first part of this book. The Committee composed of Messrs. R. S. Broomfield, I. C. S. (Judicial Officer) and R. M. Maxwell, I. C. S. (Revenue Officer) started on their labours on the 1st of November 1928 and spent the first fortnight in preliminary reading and preparation. On the 5th of November the people's case was placed before them by the people's advocate Sjt. Bhulabhai Desai at an informal conference held with the Enquiry Officers. The actual enquiry began in a village in Bardoli taluka on the 14th of November and went on until the end of January 1929 when the Officers moved to Chorasi. They camped in that taluka until the end of February, and proceeded to Matheran to draft their report having heard Sjt. Bhulabhai Desai's arguments on the 1st of March. 49 villages were inspected in Bardoli and 21 in Chorasi.

At the instance of Sjt Vallabhbhai, Sjts. Narhari Parikh, Ramnarayan Pathak and I represented the peasants, both in Bardoli and Chorasi, throughout the Enquiry, and we had in our work the diligent assistance of friends like Sjts. Mohanlal Pandya, Kalyanjibhai and Chokhavala. We are glad to note that at no stage of the enquiry was our participation regarded as an interference. Indeed the Enquiry Officers have acknowledged in the report 'the valuable assistance' rendered by us, and have gone out of their way in stating that the "people themselves, though naturally not lacking

in complaints, were entirely lacking in hostility," for which the *Times of India* correspondent had prepared them. Perhaps it is to show that this correspondent's insinuations were without any foundation that they have borne willing testimony to the people's "willingness to co-operate with us in our line of enquiry which we had not altogether expected."

The enquiry in Chorasi taluka was an offshoot of the Bardoli enquiry. It will be remembered that when the Satyagraha was launched, the Chorasi people had also come requesting Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel to join Chorasi with Bardoli, but the Sardar had asked them to hold themselves in patience until the end of the Satyagraha. "If Bardoli succeeds in getting justice," he had assured them, "Chorasi will not be denied it." The assurance proved true, and the Government were only fair in tacking Chorasi on to Bardoli in their terms of reference indicating the scope of the enquiry.

During the enquiry I used to send every week brief reports of the Committee's proceedings to *Young India* and *Navajivan*. I should have published them again as faithful records of facts in a ryotwari tract and as, I believe, a dispassionate record of an entirely official enquiry. But on second thoughts I decided that it would be too great a demand on the indulgence of the lay reader and have therefore in the succeeding chapters summarised the proceedings, and our part therein, in as succinct a way as possible, with my criticism of several statements in the report as well as of the Committee's findings.

I have to acknowledge with pleasure that the officers extended to us, throughout the enquiry, unfailing courtesy and our relations with them were of a most cordial character.

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST DAYS

THE terms of the enquiry in the Government Resolution announcing the appointment of the Officers were:

"These officers should enquire into and report upon the complaint of the people of Bardoli Taluka and Valod Mahal and Chorasi Taluka;

(a) that the enhancement of revenue recently made is not warranted in terms of the Land Revenue Code;

(b) that the reports accessible to the public do not contain sufficient data warranting the enhancement and that some of the data given are wrong; and should find that, if the people's complaint is held to be justified, what enhancement, if any, there should be upon the old assessment."

These terms, it will be remembered, were word for word the same including an obvious grammatical slip in the original draft, as submitted by Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel at the last conference with the Senior Member of Government held at Poona. Sjt. Bhulabhai Desai, who explained the people's case, at the informal conference with the Officers, took his stand

on Section 107 of the Land Revenue Code which, he argued, strictly confined the Settlement Officer to a consideration of the profits of agriculture, so far as agricultural land was concerned. A consideration of the rental statistics may be quite relevant as reflecting the true profits of agriculture but no conclusion could be based exclusively on the rental values—as the Settlement Commissioner had done. In fact to rely on them would be strictly illegal, especially in a tract like Bardoli, where according to the people, leased area was very small, and when the statistics collected lacked all scrutiny. The people would therefore lead evidence on the *net* profits of agriculture to be determined by finding out the price of the produce and deducting therefrom the cost of cultivation which included wages on various agricultural operations, seed, manure, cost of stock live and dead, interest and depreciation.

During the first week and part of the second week there was a sort of groping on both sides. The Enquiry Officers selected for their inspection such villages as had been raised to an upper group by the Settlement Officer and the Settlement Commissioner, such villages as had been otherwise mentioned in their reports, and also such as showed in the statistical tables high rentals. The people had contested both the accuracy and the scrutiny of these figures and maintained that the leased area in taluka was very small and that the figures given by the Settlement Officer entirely wrong. The Officers therefore required the Talati in every village to furnish from the village records tabulated information regarding the cultivated and the leased area. But in the very first village inspected they met with an unpleasant experience. The rental statistics for the village — Afwa

— given by the Settlement Officer were challenged by us and they therefore asked their own head clerk to prepare the statistics afresh. The enquiry revealed curious results. According to the Settlement Manual the Settlement Officer has to exclude certain transactions in preparing his table of statistics and indeed the Settlement Officer in question had claimed in his report that he had excluded those transactions. If these had been excluded the gross totals of all the leases in the village for a particular period should have considerably exceeded, and in no case could have been less than, the totals of scrutinised leases. In case of Afwa, the first village examined, however, the inquiry showed a result which was a perfect puzzle. There the so-called scrutinised area *considerably exceeded* the gross area. Thus the gross totals in the village were:

	Area	Assessment	Rent
	A. G.	Rs. As. Ps.	Rs. As. Ps.
Jirayat	62–36	239–8–0	937–0–0
Kyari	Nil	Nil	Nil
Mixed	66–15	401–13–0	1,805–7–0

The scrutinised figures in Sjt. Jayakar's appendices were :

Jirayat	127–16	574–4–0	1,821–8–0
Kyari	49–14	397–1–0	2,346–0–0

The very first village therefore gave the Officers sufficient warning, but it took them quite a fortnight to be fully warned. Every accused is at law presumed to be innocent until he is proved guilty and the Officers did nothing more than follow that sage maxim in presuming Messrs. Anderson and Jayakar to be right. But the law does not require the judge to presume the complainant to be wrong. For the first few days, however, they gave us the impression as

though they started with the presumption that the villagers were wrong. "That is the way of the peasant all the world over," said Mr. Broomfield referring to the peasant's tendency to exaggerate his case. I have an impression that he even thought, in the beginning, that the peasants would say just what we had told them. "This is not a strictly judicial inquiry and we cannot examine the witnesses on oath," said he suspecting the value of the evidence led by the peasants. But in a very few days they were disillusioned. When within a week or so they came to Bhatlav Moti, they began to realise the seriousness of the people's charge that there had been no inquiry. The village mostly inhabited by Kolis and one of the poorest in the taluka was selected by the Settlement Commissioner for promotion to Group I from Group II because of its rental statistics. The Enquiry Officers asked the village officers if Sjt. Jayakar had visited the village. "No, never," said they emphatically. "But do they know who Jayakar was?" inquired Mr. Broomfield. "We have heard that Jayakar was Deputy Collector, but having never had the good fortune of seeing him, how can we say who he was?" replied the village officers. We had scrutinised all the leases in the village, and found that nearly 75 per cent. of them were no genuine leases but simply interest transactions and had a list ready of all such. Sjt. Jayakar's total nearly tallied with the gross total of all leases and thus showed that he had not cared to eliminate these fictitious transactions. After this discovery the people's statement that there had been no inquiry ceased to cause the Officers any surprise and wherever they had the time and the inclination to probe deep into the matter they did so with an earnestness and conscientiousness that was creditable to them. They pursued this inquiry in

respect of a number of villages with, to use their own words, 'astonishing results.' Paragraph 42 of their report contains a number of such cases after a discussion of which they came to this deliberate conclusion: "Indeed one cannot really be sure of anything in connection with these appendices, and as soon as one realises that the Talatis were mainly responsible for them it is hardly necessary to look for any other explanation of their deficiencies as material for a settlement."

Faced with this situation, they had either to reject these appendices and to prepare fresh ones of genuine and scrutinised cases, or to give up the attempt altogether and to seek for a different basis of assessment. The report bears eloquent testimony to the great difficulty of the task of collecting genuine rental statistics, in view not only of the fact that in many cases parties to transactions several years old were not available, but of the fact that where the parties were available there were numerous considerations which took the leases out of the category of genuine economic leases. I shall have occasion to advert to this at length in a future chapter. Suffice it to say that during the first weeks they found themselves in a quandary. How they found a way out of it we shall see in a future chapter. But they asked us if we were prepared with our figures of yield and cost of production that we had promised at the preliminary informal conference. We then began to submit elaborate statements giving particulars of yield and cost of production. In the early stages, we confess, our statements were not prepared with the accuracy and care necessary for statements of that nature. They were prepared in Gujarati and as the Officers did not know the language they were hard put to it to get them translated. In the course of a few days, however,

we evolved a system, and submitted brief statements in English and asked the Officers to examine the people as regards those statements. In every case, however, they were statements of loss and not of profit on the unit of cultivation in the village, and that created for them a puzzle no less difficult than the one presented by Sjt. Jayakar's 'astonishing' appendices. It took them three or four weeks to decide to reject our method of approach also and they fell back again on the rental statistics. I propose to canvass their method at length in a future chapter. It is sufficient to note here that as regards head a of the terms of reference they came to the conclusion that there was nothing in Section 107 of the Land Revenue Code to make reliance on the rental statistics contrary to the letter of the law, though they agreed that in relying on the statistics that the Settlement Officer and Settlement Commissioner had done they might have offended against the *spirit* of Section 107.

One of our objections was that according to a strict interpretation of Section 107 regard ought to be had to the profits of agriculture in respect of agricultural land, and not to the value of the land, which was to be considered only when non-agricultural land was in question. The Officers found themselves unable to accept our view, but said that the question of interpretation was immaterial inasmuch as the value of agricultural land would "normally depend on its capacity for producing profits." "The main criterion," they agreed, "is the profits of agriculture."

CHAPTER II

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

THE Committee's finding on point (b) in the terms of reference based on a very large volume of evidence collected and carefully sifted is the most important part of the report. On this head they had to go minutely into the data relied upon by the Settlement Officer and the Settlement Commissioner and examine into the complaint that they did not warrant the enhancement and that some of them were wrong. As we have seen, an examination of the rental statistics in a very few villages had set them seriously thinking as to the accuracy and value of those tables. But there were certain general considerations on which the Settlement Officer had relied both for recommending an alteration in the grouping of villages and for fixing the rates of assessment. If the reader will turn to Chapter III and IV of Part I he will find the Government's and the people's case summarised therein. The enquiry in which the people's representatives co-operated resulted in showing that the people's case was even stronger than has been made out in Chapter IV of Part I.

I. The first consideration on which Sjt. Jayakar had relied was that "communications have considerably

improved, including the opening of the broad guage line of the Tapti Valley Railway." The Officers' finding on the condition of roads was as emphatic as they could make without having any data as to their condition thirty years ago: "As for the alleged improvement in the condition of roads, that is a matter which we have no means of judging. We do not know what the former condition was. But we are in a position to speak of the present condition of the roads, having spent nearly three months in touring the taluka, and our opinion is not favourable. Not one of the old main roads, not even the road through Sarbhon to Navsari, can properly be described as good. There are fair stretches on them. There are also numerous patches where, if the roads were any worse than they are, they would not deserve the name of roads at all. That they are good enough for bullock carts and just passable for motor cars is about all that can be said of them. As for the by-roads and tracks between villages, it is hardly possible that they have improved much, since in any worse condition they would not be usable, even by bullock carts." They agreed that two newly constructed roads might be regarded as a distinct improvement in communications, but they were not sure to what extent they added to the people's prosperity. They might have done well to reiterate the maxim that local fund roads should not be considered as agricultural improvements.

As regards the much talked of Tapti Valley Railway they made careful inquiries at every station on the line in the taluka, accepted the people's contention (repeated from time to time before and after Satyagraha) that "though this railway had not been actually open at the time of the first revision, it was practically completed and was then taken into consideration in

the proposals then sanctioned." In fact they went further and found that though the Settlement Officer in 1897 had described the railway as "the harbinger of more prosperous times for Bardoli," the stations on the line were 'negligible' from the point of view of goods traffic. It would therefore follow that even the rates in 1897 were excessive based as they were on the supposed benefits of the railway!

As regards the introduction of motor traffic, the Officers note that far from being an index of agricultural prosperity, they found that "it may even be a source of loss to the ryot." But losses evidently do not need to be considered in the fixing of rates of assessment!

The Officers' enquiry into the marketing facilities were even more thorough. They went into the question at every village to find out whether by any stretch of argument those facilities could be regarded as a ground for promotion of a village to a higher group. I am glad to note that they generally accepted the statements of the people in this connection, agreed that far from using the nearest gins for marketing their cotton the people went where they had high rates and prompt payment, and found that the Settlement Officer did not know what he was talking when he spoke "of Bardoli, Madhi, Valod, Kamalchhod and Buhari as the centres of ginning and pressing industry as though they were more or less of equal importance." The fact, however, was, as the Officers point out, that "the gin at Kamalchhod closed down about five years ago and must have been moribund at the time Mr. Jayakar's report was written. That at Buhari, at the present time at any rate, has very little importance. The fact is that there has been practically no increase in the number of gins at all." As regards other exports, the Officers found that "in a great majority of villages rice is not grown

for export at all," that although "Mr. Jayakar says that 'large quantities of grass are grown . . . and brought to Surat bazaar for sale, where good prices are as a rule realised,'" "nowhere (except at one small village) was it admitted that any grass was exported at all," and that "there is no doubt that the Surat market is mainly supplied by certain villages in the Chorasi taluka and in Baroda territory within easy distance of the city; and in a large proportion of the villages in both talukas the grass area is no more than sufficient, in many cases it is less than sufficient for local needs."

Having thus disposed of the data affecting the grouping of villages they went into those affecting rates of assessment.

II. Increase in population. This point of Sjt. Jayakar's is neatly disposed of by the Officers in a few sentences: "The increase of population in Bardoli according to available statistics, is so small as to be negligible. In Chorasi there is practically no increase, and the births and deaths balance one another almost exactly. Population, therefore, is not a factor which enters materially into this settlement at all."

III. The increase in the number of milch cattle and carts. How apparent, rather than real, was this increase has been shown by the Officers by comparing not the figures for 1905-06 with those for 1924-25, as Sjt. Jayakar had gone, but those for 1894-95 (the first settlement) with those for 1924-25:

BARDOLI

	1894-95	1904-05	1924-25
Plough cattle	18,348	11,234	18,127
Cows	8,835	6,370	8,283
She buffaloes	8,977	7,439	10,854
Agricultural carts	5,732	4,352	6,055

Their remark on these figures is: "The increases are hardly remarkable enough to lay much stress upon, except in the case of mich buffaloes." But they could have pointed out that the increase of 1,877 buffaloes for a population of 88,000 souls could not mean much, and there was no evidence to show that the increase was all due to the purchases made by agriculturists. Non-agriculturists or non-khatedars too possess a number of milch cattle.

IV. New and well built *pucca* houses. The Officers accepted generally the evidence led everywhere about these houses. "A great many of the more imposing edifices," they agreed, "belong to the 'South Africans,' and those of course have not built out of the profits of agriculture, at any rate in this country. Large houses again, are sometimes evidence, not so much of prosperity as of extravagance and ostentation. For instance, in Bamni the competition in house building has largely increased the indebtedness of the village. Another point is that in these parts the cultivator's house has to accommodate, not only his family, but also his cattle, and on the upper storey his store of grain for the year. The size of the building is therefore misleading, if compared with houses in other parts of the country where the cattle etc. are separately provided for." The detailed description shows that the Officers took good care to use the evidence of their eyes, whilst the Settlement Officer had kept his eyes completely closed.

V. *Improved condition of the Kaliparaj*. While the Settlement Officer had contented himself with making a few vague remarks about the seeming prosperity of this community the Officers inquired, wherever they had time, into the condition of these people and came to the conclusion that though the signs of emancipa-

tion were not wanting, "we doubt very much if there has been so rapid or marked an improvement in status as Mr. Jayakar asserts. The Kaliparaj still remain a backward and ignorant class, lamentably *savkar*-ridden. The social uplift of the community may be said to be well begun, but in the nature of things it is bound to be a slow process." It is all the more surprising, in view of these remarks, that the Officers in recommending the rates should have penalised two villages by enhancing their rates by 25 per cent., apparently because of the slight improvement in their condition due to the work of the "social reformers from the Ashrams."

VI. Abnormal rise in the prices of food grains and of cotton. Evidence was led everywhere to show that the cotton prices far from benefitting the agriculturists had ruined them, especially the tenants, and the Officers accepting it observe "that the cotton boom was by no means an unmixed blessing from the ryots' point of view; indeed on a consideration of all the circumstances, it may be regarded as less a blessing than a curse . . . In the mania for 'getting rich by cotton,' not only landless men and adventurers, but cultivators of every class and position, bound themselves to pay rents, often for long terms, which they had no prospect of being able to pay, except in the unlikely event of the boom continuing indefinitely. When, on the contrary, prices fell and continued on the down grade, heavy losses, debts and sometimes insolvency followed, the natural results of speculation which fails to come off."

VII. "Agricultural wages have doubled." The Officers had no difficulty in dismissing this palpably absurd argument in a sentence: "Some ('conclusions'), taken by themselves, would suggest, not an enhance-

ment, but a reduction of the land revenue, namely the abnormal increase in the price of food grains (not here largely grown for export) and the fact that agricultural wages have doubled."

VIII. The consideration that weighed most with Sjt. Jayakar was that the price of the total products of the taluka represented a clear increase of Rs. 15,08,077 over the products during the previous settlement. The obvious answer that there was a contemporaneous increase in the cost of production could not fail to appeal to the Officers, as it had appealed even to Mr. Anderson, and they dismissed the whole thing as 'guesswork.' But they thought it superfluous to criticise Sjt. Jayakar's line of reasoning "in view of the fact that the Settlement Commissioner's proposals and the orders of Government rest upon an entirely different foundation," *viz.*, rental statistics. If the Officers had studied the correspondence that passed between the Government and various public men, during the Satyagraha, they would have seen that the Government relied not only on the rental statistics but also on Sjt. Jayakar's reasoning which they more than once upheld.

As regards one of the main grounds of attack, *viz.*, the abnormal prices in the years immediately preceding the year of the new settlement, the Officers agree that "the price now reached by rice in Bardoli is exactly what it was in 1914. So far as the available figures can be relied upon, therefore, they appear to show not only that the high prices prevailing in the decade 1914 to 1924 were abnormal, but further that, in the case of the food grains at any rate the permanent increase over pre-war prices need not be expected to be very marked. . . . . It is very important to remember in connection with prices that whereas

cotton is the staple export in these talukas, *jowari* is grown almost entirely and rice mainly, for local consumption. If therefore the result of the abnormal conditions in the years following the war should be a considerable permanent increase in the price of the former commodity, without a corresponding permanent increase in the price of foodstuffs, this result ought to be decidedly beneficial to the agricultural community. . . . On the whole then the position does not appear to give much excuse for pessimism, though Mr. Jayakar's rosy estimates on the gross produce have to go by the board."

In this connection it may be remarked that evidence was led to show that the cost of cultivation had nearly trebled since the last settlement (some of the items having even quadrupled). The Officers were not inclined to examine an old Patel who had put in over 30 years service and who had submitted a statement in this behalf. They were prepared to admit that the cost of cultivation had increased, but the circumstance did not seem to them to affect the question of the assessment!

CHAPTER III

THE RENTAL DATA

HAVING disposed of the general considerations on which the Settlement Officer had relied either for altering the groups of villages or determining the rates, the Officers have proceeded to examine the accuracy and value of the rental statistics which were exclusively relied upon by the Settlement Commissioner, and which, in my opinion, were included in the settlement report by the Settlement Officer, as properly scrutinised figures worthy of reliance, simply because of the excessive insistence of the Settlement Commissioner. This examination is by far and away the most valuable part of the Officers' Report.

We have seen in the first chapter how some of the 'astonishing' discrepancies between the gross and scrutinised statistics aroused the suspicion of the Officers as regards the accuracy of those tables. We shall now see how a thorough examination of them convinced the Officers that the existing statistics were unworthy of *any* reliance being placed on them. Having discovered that the Officers were going to devote the best part of their time to an examination of these statistics, we also devoted considerable time to an

examination of the leasing transactions in every village and by thorough and searching private inquiries ascertained the particular circumstances governing those leases. We also pointed out, at many places, the inaccuracies in the village records, and their inadequacy, from their very nature, for revealing the true nature of the transactions in question. I may say that for a few days the Officers were disposed to accept even our statements with excessive caution if not suspicion, but during the latter part of the enquiry they were convinced that our labours were directed as much towards helping them as towards strengthening our case, so much so that in the Report itself they bore this unreserved testimony to the value of our co-operation:

> "In addition to the compilation of much useful information on their own lines, these gentlemen had systematically investigated and tabulated in advance the rental or sale transactions of each village in our programme, and their detailed knowledge of individual cases not infrequently enabled us to obtain more accurate information than would otherwise have been available. We gladly acknowledge here the conscientious and impartial manner in which this assistance was given to us and its real value for the purposes of this enquiry."

As a result, the Officers decided that the following transactions ought to be excluded from calculation:

1. Where the amount shown as 'rent' really represented interest on money borrowed or in arrears, or interest on a sum which the tenant, previously owner of the land, had received under a conditional sale, hoping in time to repay. There were numerous such in many villages, especially the '*savkar-ridden*' villages.

2. Leases which were the result of family arrangements, sometimes the so-called 'rent' being set apart for maintenance of minors. (In one village there was the case of a husband being shown as tenant of his wife.)

3. Leases where rent shown for a particular field included rent for fields in other villages, or included rent of houses or huts.

Then there were numerous leases where particular circumstances affected the amount of the rent which by itself could not be taken as the normal leasing value of agricultural land:

1. Leases of grazing land showing abnormal rates.

2. Leases where the landlord had incurred expenditure, before the lease, by manuring the land, or ploughing it up, or clearing or hedging it, or by 'tractoring' it.

3. Leases where the rent included the usufruct of trees standing on the land.

4. Leases entered into during the cotton boom for abnormally high rates.

5. Leases where the tenant was ruined, where there was a decree against him, and the decree had not been executed because the tenant had no means or was absconding.

6. Leases where the rent was only partially recovered or not recovered at all.

7. Leases where the rent included payment of assessment.

8. Leases where high rent was paid because of the advantageous situation of the land.

9. Leases where the amount shown as rent was higher than the landlord expected to recover.

10. Leases with particular conditions attached to them. For instance in a village in Chorasi a woman

trading in green grass had leased 40 acres (assessed at Rs. 68-6) for Rs. 1,001 annually! The woman appeared before the Officers and explained that the lease was entered into when the grass rates were very high, that she paid only Rs. 600 annually, that the landlord had promised to make her a gift of 10 *bighas* of the land if she paid the rent regularly for a number of years, that she had been in arrears for some years and in some years she had had to sell her ornaments to pay the amount. The bald entry in the register would show that the land fetched rent 15 times the assessment!

Realising the enormous variety of these rents and the impossibility of ascertaining their true character and value without examining the parties in each case, the Officers came to the deliberate conclusion (1) that the scrutiny could not be made in the time available to the ordinary Settlement Officer, except as regards leases for a comparatively few recent years in the villages he is able to visit; (2) that it was impossible to verify leases even after ten years; (3) that even where they could be verified for a few years, the process meant elaborate and even tedious inquiry.

But the Settlement Officer had made the extravagent claim that the rental statistics for the 24 years that he had compiled for his report were all verified, and that he had excluded certain transactions. Now although internal evidence was sufficient to show that the claim was absurd and the statement false, the Officers exhaustively examined the other officers connected with the preparation of the statistics, and found from their evidence that "*the preparation of the appendices was practically left to the Talatis, the circle inspectors and the taluka and peta staff, with very little detailed check by the Aval Karkun, and none, or next to none, by the Settlement Officer, himself.*"

I may mention in passing that Government, who had allowed themselves to be misled throughout the Satyagraha, had provided the Enquiry Officers with Sjt. Jayakar's diaries purporting to show that he had visited the villages and verified the transactions. We asked to be shown the diaries, especially because during the Satyagraha Mr. Smart, the Commissioner, had flaunted these diaries in the face of Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel to show that our complaint that there had been no inquiry was without any foundation. But we were told that it was unnecessary for us to see the diaries, as they were not put in as evidence in the case, and had been only confidentially supplied to them! Anyhow, the Officers came to the deliberate conclusion which they have worded as cautiously as possible: "Though we do not wish to attach undue importance to what village officers and others have told us as to the perfunctory character of his village inspection, we are bound to record that in no single village of the 70 which we ourselves inspected were we able to discover that he (the Settlement Officer) had made *any* personal examination of leasing transactions there." (Italics as in the Report.) They might have said that he had prepared false diaries, but the diaries were unfortunately not in evidence! The finding against him is quite patent in this conclusion of the Enquiry Officers:

> "From what has been said above it will be clear that, in our opinion, Mr. Jayakar's chief mistake was, not that he failed to attach sufficient importance to his rental statistics, compiled as they were compiled; but that he failed to explain the true character of the statistics which he had collected, *and by pretending, or by allowing it to appear*, that they had been properly scrutinised and verified

(which they had not been, except by his subordinates), misled the Settlement Commissioner and Government into supposing that these plausible appendices could be made the main foundation of the settlement."

(It may be mentioned in passing that the officer against whom this serious indictment has been made still occupies the position of the Collector of a district!)

But, to my mind, the responsibility for the whole sorry affair must be shared equally by the Settlement Commissioner, Mr. Anderson. The Settlement Commissioner in his anxiety to base the settlement on his 'one true guide', *viz.*, the rental statistics allowed himself to be misled, or used the statistics knowing that they were unverified, for the simple reason that he himself attached little importance to the scrutiny. I am inclined to think that he allowed the Settlement Officer to bodily incorporate in his report a paragraph from another officer's report containing the usual formula about the verification or scrutiny having been made by the Settlement Officer. That he himself attached no importance to scrutiny is revealed by two pieces of evidence on which the Enquiry Officers might have dwelt at some length, if they had chosen to. The Settlement Commissioner visited a few villages in Bardoli and one village in Chorasi and pretended to have made personal scrutiny of the leases. At the inspection the Enquiry Officers found that in the Bardoli villages the lease carrying a high rent mentioned by him was not to be found at all, that though almost all leases in the villages were 'interest' leases Mr. Anderson had nothing to say about them and he promoted the villages to a higher group on

the strength of those unverified leases! They also found that in a case of high rent in a village in Chorasi which he claimed to have personally inquired into, he had really made *no* inquiries. Here are the remarks in the Report:

> "S. No. 511 of Adajan, 27 gunthas, Rs. 10 assessment, rented for Rs. 50. This is grass land with 2 *bor* trees in it, but it also contains a well of good drinking water, and the Parsee owner of the adjoining toddy-palm grove, whose servants formerly used the well for nothing, now has to pay a high rent for the field in order to secure the water (The Settlement Commissioner, by the way, mentions this survey number in the appendix to his report as an instance of the high rents realised in Adajan)."

That I think is enough to show that between the the Settlement Officer and the Settlement Commissioner, it is difficult to say whose delinquency was greater. This worthy officer (Mr. Anderson) has been responsible for numerous settlements in the presidency and is now enjoying a handsome pension!

CHAPTER IV

'PROFITS OF AGRICULTURE'

I have mentioned in a previous chapter that at the first conference with the Enquiry Officers we had contended that rentals could not be a true indication of agricultural profits, but that the profits must be ascertained from the direct evidence of actual figures of yield and cost of production. Our statements about all villages were detailed, and in the first instances we indicated in minute detail how we calculated the various items. I submit here our statement about one village, both for purposes of record, and with a view to showing to what extent, if any, the Enquiry Officers' criticism of our method is justified:

STATEMENT ABOUT SARBHON

1. AVERAGE YIELD PER ACRE:

Cotton	6.25	maunds
Rice	35	,,
Jowari	12	,,
Pulses (with Jowari)	1	,,
Val	6	,,
Grass	1,600	bundles

2. UNIT: 19 acres per plough.

Cotton 8 acres; Jowari 3 acres; Kyari 2 acres; grass 4 acres; grazing 2.

3. PRICES of PRODUCE:

Rs. 387–8	Cotton	maunds	50	(rate Rs. 7–12)
,, 72–0	Jowari	,,	36	(,, ,, 2)

"	6–0	Pulses "	3 (" " 2)
"	95–0	Rice "	70 (" " 9 per *hara*)
"	12–0	Val "	12 (" " 1)
"	3–0	Castorseed "	8 (" " 1)
"	4–8	Jowari Kadab 450 bundles (Re. 1 per 100)	
"	4–8	Jowari *tolans* and pulse *gotar*	
"	10–0	Paddy hay bundles 2,000 (Rs. 5 per 1,000)	
"	10–0	Val *gotar* 15 maunds (at $1\frac{1}{2}$ maund per rupee)	
"	64–0	Grass bundles 6,400 (Rs. 10 per 1,000)	
Rs.	668–8		

N. B. 1. Cotton fetched Rs. 186 per *bhar*, as the bulk of it was sold through the cotton co-operative society, the middleman's commission being saved. Besides the cotton was sold by the society at the opportune moment.

2. Grazing excluded both on the credit and the debit side.

4. COST OF CULTIVATION:

Rs.	215–0	Cost of maintaining a pair of bullocks
"	151–0	" " " a *dubla*
"	183–8	Labour charges on various agricultural operations (excluding the labour charges of the *dubla* and including those of working members of the family)
"	16–8	Seed
"	81–0	Manure
"	24–0	Repairs of dead-stock
"	110–12	Depreciation and interest on the cost of live and dead-stock

Rs. 781-12
Less 668–8 Rs. Proceeds of yield

Loss 113–4 Rs.

5. INDEBTEDNESS: Rs. 1,20,496 (list of debtors with their debts attached).

With a view to testing the accuracy of the figures the Officers decided, in the earlier stages, to examine peasants as regards the yield of their fields and the cost of cultivation. Thus a peasant belonging to the village for which the statement has been given, was picked up from amongst a crowd of them and was put through the rack of cross-examination for upwards of an hour and a half. I give the result of his examination in detail inasmuch as the same has been reproduced and made the subject of comment in the Report. He was asked to name his crops for the last year. "15 acres and ten gunthas cotton; 12 acres 25 gunthas grass; 6 acres *jowari*; 2 acres and 39 gunthas rice; 30 gunthas wheat, beans and castor in the rice fields (second crop); 2 acres and 23 gunthas pulses," he said in reply.

'How many ploughs have you?'

'Two.'

'And bullocks?

'Two pairs. One small pair I sold this year for Rs. 169.'

'You cultivated all the land with *one* pair this year?

'Yes;' but I gave up three fields measuring 10 acres and 19 gunthas and as for the other land shared a plough and pair of bullocks with another.'

'Give us then the yield of the several crops.'

'Paddy 105 maunds; cotton 108 maunds; *jowari* 60 maunds; beans 14 maunds; pulses $4\frac{3}{4}$ maunds; 25,000 single bundles of grass; 1,200 *jowari* stalk bundles; 40 maunds chaff; 3,000 bundles of paddy hay.'

'How much did you sell the cotton for?'

'Rs. 186 per *bhar*.'

'And grass?'

'No grass was sold.'

'But if you had sold it, what price would it have fetched?'

'Rs. 5 per 1,000 bundles.'

'Was the rate higher last year?'

'It was Rs. 6 last year, Rs. 7 year before last and Rs. 7-8 the year before that.'

'You sold the beans? At what rate?'

'We consumed it at home.'

'How many head of cattle have you?'

'3 buffaloes, 1 young buffalo, 4 cows, 3 young ones, 4 bullocks.'

'Give us the cash expenditure you had to incur on one pair of bullocks.'

'I had to purchage *guvar*, oilcake, oil, *ghi*, salt, turmeric, jaggery etc.'

'You reserved these delicacies for your good bullocks or you gave them to your cows too?'

'No; they were meant only for the bullocks.'

'Well then, give us the various items.'

'I give the items for a pair: *guvar* Rs. 34; oilcake Rs. 25; Rs. 10 oil and *ghi*; Rs 2-8 salt.'

'Surely the bullocks do not eat salt?'

'Salt has to be given with the grain that is given them.'

'You purchased salt on that account or used it out of the home provisions?'

'I had purchased 10 maunds for home. Half of it was used for the bullocks.'

'How many *dublas* had you?'

'Four last year.'

'What is the cost of maintenance of a *dubla*?'

'Rs. 150 a year?'

'How do you calculate that?'

'Rs. 11-4 a month at the rate of 6 annas worth of food every day.'

'What is the cash you give them and and how much grain?'

'He borrows usually Rs. 25 every year; we give him Rs. 15 worth of clothes and shoes; and he gets his meals.'

'Rs. 25 is debitted to him?'

'He repays perhaps Rs. 2 to Rs. 3 at the cotton picking season, the rest is never paid.'

'How much manure you purchased?'

'I had my own farmyard manure. Besides that I purchased Rs. 42 worth of manure.'

The following paragraph appears in the report in criticism of this statement:

> "His information was given from memory, on the spur of the moment, and is probably not precisely accurate. But taking the figures for what they are worth (and he is not likely either to have exaggerated his outturn or minimised his expenditure), we find the position to be this. He realised Rs. 837 by the sale of his cotton. In the ordinary way one gathered that he would have realised some additional amount by selling his grass; but there was no demand for grass that year, owing to the fact that most of the cattle were sent away into the Gaekwadi territory to avoid attachment. We may accept his statement that he sold nothing but his cotton. His cash expenditure on cultivation, on his own showing, amounted to about Rs. 305 (143 for 2 pairs of bullocks, 42 for manure, and say Rs. 120 for the 4 *dublas*). Then there would be the assessment on his own lands, Rs. 145, and the rent for the 20 acres and 13 gunthas leased. Unfortunately the

rent paid was not ascertained. The leases for some reason were not entered in the tenancy register; and some confusion was caused by the fact that he failed to remember one of the leases on the day we examined him and brought the information about it after we had left the village. The ordinary leasing rate for *jirayat* land in Sarbhon, according to the people themselves, was Rs. 6 to Rs. 8 per *bigha*. At that rate he would have had to pay Rs. 195 to 260 as rent. According to what we found the ordinary rate to be for 1927–28, 3½ times the assessment, he would have to pay considerably more, say Rs. 300, allowing for the fact that he is part owner of one of the numbers leased. Even taking the latter rate one need feel no doubt as to the solvency of his position. He would have a cash balance of Rs. 87, without taking any account of the profit from his buffaloes, and he has produced over 10½ lbs. of rice and over 6 lbs. of *jowari* for every day of the year; the ordinary daily ration for a man being 1 lb. of rice and 1½ lbs. of *jowari*. There would appear to be too much rice and not quite enough *jowari* for the family, including the *dublas*, but presumably that would be adjusted somehow, and one can see no reason why cash expenditure on food should be more than trifling. But supposing the budget was drawn up in the ordinary form, with cost of maintenance of bullocks put down at Rs. 200 or more per pair, 4 *dublas* for Rs. 150 each, manure at Rs. 180 or more (for two units) and so forth, there is no doubt at all that the result would have been a heavy deficit."

A word of comment on this detailed criticism is necessary. The Officers, I am thankful, have paid a tribute to our 'industry and care', our sincere desire of assisting them to ascertain the truth, as also our 'scrupulous fairness and accuracy.' Indeed they have honoured us, in one place, with the complimentary epithet of their 'collaborators.' How I wish, in the same spirit, they had discussed with us what had been passing in their minds about the statements we submitted. If they had done so, they would at least have been able to avoid some of the obvious errors that they have committed. For instance in the case in question, they have taken the total cash expenditure to amount to Rs. 395, ignoring altogether the fact that they had made no inquiries into one heavy item of cost, *viz., cash labour charges.* Secondly they seem to make no distinction between *paddy* and *rice*. The agriculturist in question produced not 10½ lbs. of rice, but paddy which would not yield much more than five pounds of rice. Thirdly they think that his cash expense on food should not have been more than trifling. This is a groundless assumption, as they do not seem to make any distinction between the way of life of a *dubla* and an *anavla brahman*. Having spent two or three days in the village amongst a population of *anavla brahmans* they should have known better. But even if we ignore the patent omission and the obvious errors, let us see what their analysis of the income and expenditure leads us to. Here is his

AGRICULTURAL INCOME

CASH	KIND	
Rs. 837 Cotton	Rs. 142-8-0	Paddy
	120-0-0	Jowari
	14-0-0	Val
	9-8-0	Pulses
	Rs. 286-0-0	

124-0-0 Grass
12-0-0 Stalks
15-0-0 Litter
25-0-0 Paddy fodder

Rs. 462-0-0

EXPENSE

CASH
143 Bullocks
42 Manure
120 Four Dublas

---

305 plus 300 Rent
plus the unascertained item of cash labour charges?

Now assuming that this incorrect figure was correct, what did the agriculturist have to maintain himself? He had with him Rs. 837 minus Rs. 605 *i. e.* Rs. 232 in cash. He had thus at his disposal Rs. 232 in cash and Rs. 286 worth of grain, out of which he had to find Rs. 145 assessment and maintain himself and his family and four *dublas!* That is to say maintain himself and his family and four *dublas* on Rs. (232 + 286 — 145) 373 a year. That is the '*solvency*' of his position! The fact is that the man falls back on the savings of one or two of the members of his family who are serving elsewhere, and on the income from *ghi* and milk. The claim to include these last items under agricultural income is, I submit, preposterous.

The Officers have done us the honour of publishing in their report the actual budget of an agriculturist in Kamalchhod, of course with a view to showing the erroneousness of our theory of agricultural losses. I am afraid in their criticism of that budget too

they have grossly erred. Here is the budget which I submit as a sample for adoption by those interested in rural economic inquiries in the contry.

An Agriculturist's Budget

We submitted figures of the actual income and expenditure of a typical agriculturist who approximated to our unit of a cultivator with a pair of bullocks for the village. He was the type of a good agriculturist giving the maximum of personal labour and having a fairly good harvest and yet he failed to make any profit out of agriculture and had to make both ends meet with the help of his buffaloes. Four years ago he sold his house for Rs. 2,000, liquidated his father's debt and purchased a pair of bullocks worth Rs. 400, and had up to now managed to keep his head above water.

He had a *dubla* who cost him only Rs. 135 as he was unmarried and lived with his master and worked with him throughout the year, for an annual salary of Rs. 30 all found.

The agriculturist worked on his land with his wife and a son of 15. The latter two were however half-timers and we therefore counted them as equal to one wholetime labourer.

In calculating the cost of cultivation we deliberately excluded depreciation charges roughly amounting to Rs. 120.

He cultivated 28½ *bighas* of land (17 *bighas* cotton, 9 *bighas jowari* and 2½ *bighas* rice). He had no grass lands and had to purchase grass for his bullocks.

The budget that we submitted was interesting in several ways. We divided it nnder two heads, agricultural and non-agricultural, and put down the figures of income and expenditure in double columns —income in cash and income in kind, expenditure in cash and expenditure in kind.

Here is the agricultural budget:

CASH INCOME

Rs. 462-0-0 (For 66 maunds of cotton at the rate of Rs. 7 per maund)

INCOME IN KIND expressed in money value

Rs. 91-14-0 Jowari ($52\frac{1}{2}$ maunds at the rate of Rs. 1-12-0 per maund)

100-0-0 Rice (70 maunds at Rs. 10 per *harda* of 7 maunds)

5-0-0 Val (5 maunds)

24-0-0 Pulses (12 maunds)

33-0-0 Fodder:

9/- Jowari fodder

9/- Jowari litter

10/- Paddy fodder

5/- Val fodder

10-0-0 Price of bullocks' manure

Rs. 263-14-0

Note: Cotton he sold, the other agricultural produce he kept for consumption at home, for himself and his family and for his cattle.

CASH EXPENDITURE

Rs. 159-4-0 (Rs. 100 worth of grass and Rs. 59-4-0 worth of grain and other articles of food for the bullocks)

30-0-0 *Dubla*'s salary

12-0-0 Shoes and clothing for *dubla*

46-12-0 Cash payment to 187 labourers at annas 4 a day

7-8-0 Cotton seed

24-0-0 Repairs of cart, implements, castor oil for lubricating etc.

Rs. 279-8-0

EXPENDITURE IN KIND

Rs. 5-0-0 *Val* fodder for bulloks
112-0-0 Food charges of the *dubla* at annas 5 a day
23-6-0 Extra charges of one meal given to the labourers
7-8-0 *Jowari*, Rice and *Val* seed
60-0-0 Manure
234-0-0 Boarding charges of two working members of the family

Rs. 542-6-0

INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
Rs. 462-0-0	Cash	Rs. 279-8-0	Cash
263-14-0	Kind	542-6-0	Kind
Rs. 725-14-0		Rs. 821-14-0	
Rs. 96-0-0	Loss		

How did he meet the loss and pay the assessment of Rs. 58-7-0? The answer is supplied by the non-agricultural budget:

CASH INCOME

Rs. 255-0-0 Buffaloes' *ghi* (6 maunds sold at Rs. 42-8-0 per maund)

INCOME IN KIND

Rs. 42-0-0 Value of *ghi* and milk consumed at home
50-0-0 Buffaloes' manure

Rs. 92-0-0

CASH EXPENDITURE

Rs. 112-8-0 Cotton seed purchased for the buffaloes (75 maunds at Rs. 1-8-0 per maund)
24-12-0 Grain for buffaloes
14-0-0 *Methi* and sesamun
10-0-0 Condiments etc. for buffaloes at calving time

Rs. 161-4-0

EXPENDITURE IN KIND

Rs. 9-0-0 *Jowari* fodder
9-0-0 *Jowari* litter
10-0-0 Paddy fodder

Rs. 28-0-0

INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
Rs. 255-0-0	Cash	Rs. 161-4-0	Cash
92-0-0	Kind	28-0-0	Kind
Rs. 347-0-0		Rs. 189-4-0	
	Profit	,, 157-12-0	
		Rs. 347-0-0	

Profit Rs. 157-12-0 less agricultural loss Rs. 96, less assessment Rs. 58-7-0, *i. e.*, Rs. 3-5-0.

Here is our note on the budget (which unfortunately the Committee's Report omits):

"This balance of Rs. 3-5-0 cannot afford the agriculturist his clothing and other needs. In fact we have to feed out of Rs. 234-0-0 not *two* members but three, husband and wife and son. The fact that the cultivator is still out of debt means that either the family actually ate less than we allowed them or that they had some cash balance of previous years to fall back upon. The budget, it will be seen, leaves the cultivator no margin for depreciation charges, which means that when he has to invest in a fresh pair of bullocks, a fresh cart and fresh implements, he will have to get into debt. Another thing worth noting is that the cultivator must have realised much more from his cotton than he did last year. If the price of cotton had been Rs. 10 per maund (as in the boom years) the cash value of his

present cotton crop would have been Rs. 660, *i. e.*, Rs. 198 more than he realised last year. In that case he would have had a profit of Rs. 102 and not a loss of Rs. 96 as in this year."

Here is the Officers' criticism :

"The budget shows a balance on the right side of Rs. 3-5 only, and according to Mr. Narahari's analysis ot it, it is really a deficit budget because no allowance has been made for clothes and depreciation. According to the estimate given elsewhere a pair of bullocks and two buffaloes give manure worth Rs. 100. The allowance of Rs. 60 only for this seems therefore to be an underestimate, not very important perhaps, but still of some consequence, seeing that the assessment on the holding with the local fund only amounts to Rs. 58-7-0 and Rs. 40 would go a great way towards paying it. But the really interesting point is that the holding produces more than 7 lbs. of rice and nearly 5½ lbs. of *jowari* for every day of the year, to feed two men, a woman and a boy, more than enough for the ordinary ration. The value of all the grain is put down in the budget at Rs. 191-4-0 while on debit side there are items of Rs. 112-8-0 and Rs .234 *i. e.*, Rs. 346-8-0 in all for food charges. It is obvious that the actual cost of any extra food purchased can only be a small fraction of the difference between Rs. 346-8-0 and Rs. 191-4-0 and that this agriculturist can well afford to clothe himself and his family properly, and also to put aside something for depreciation. This seems a very good example, coming from the opposite camp, so to speak, of the difficulty of making the two sides of the balance sheet really equivalent."

The same confusion about *paddy* and *rice* as in the first instance and the same readiness to assume that a villager expends practically nothing on food-stuffs from the market! The discrepancy about the item of manure is no discrepancy, for the cost of manure in every village differs, in the village in question it was Rs. 1-8-0 per cart, whereas in the instance cited by the Officers it was Rs. 2-0-0 per cart. The Officers seem to believe that the agriculturist ought to be able to maintain himself and his family and *dubla* on Rs. 346-8-0 minus Rs. 96 minus Rs. 58-7 (assessment), *i.e.*, Rs. 192-1-0 per year!

I submit that the Officers have not been able substantially to touch our theory of agricultural losses. By the bye, on the day we submitted this actual budget we had an interesting conversation which throws some light on the whole subject:

'Assuming that the man in question sustains the loss you have shown, what would he have got as rent if he had leased all his land?'

'But the fact is that the average agriculturist does not lease out his land, but cultivates it himself.'

'But if he did, he would have a profit.'

'But why suppose the impossible? If all gave their land on lease, there would be no one to take it! If you can prove that 80 to 90 per cent. of the agriculturists lease their lands and enjoy rents you may claim a percentage of the rents as agricultural profits.'

'We are enamoured of the rental theory no more than you. But to go on calculating income and expenditure as you do is a most tedious process and there is no time for it.'

'More tedious is the verification of rents!'

'That may be, but if we went on dissecting your statements we would have to give two to three weeks to a village.'

'That is inevitable. To make a settlement for 30 years is no joke.'

'Right. But think of the staff that Government would have to maintain and the expense that they would have to incur.'

In their note on the indebtedness of the people, they say: "If we had gone further and made an attempt to ascertain what proporation of the total amount of indebtedness could in fairness be attributed to the unprofitableness of agriculture, it is impossible to say how long the investigation would have lasted." I confess in indicating the indebtedness of every village, we should have shown separately the items of agricultural indebtedneas and non-agricultural indebtedness, but we did not do so as we saw no inclination on the part of the Officers to go into these statements. In fact they examined only two villagers in Bardoli, and none in Chorasi, on the budget statements submitted by us. The bulk of their time was earmarked, so to say, for verification of the rental statistics, which seemed to them to be the only convenient way of arriving at the maximum rates of assessment.

The whole subject of indebtedness has been dealt with in a spirit of lightness which sorts ill with the balanced and serious character of the rest of the Report. That is the obvious disadvantage of a Settlement Officer who does not come from the people. We grudge the agriculturist his expenses for non-agricultural purposes, whilst we live on his industry and whilst the non-agriculturist lives in better comfort and is not taxed until he makes an income

exceeding Rs. 2,000 a year! The question is not why the agriculturist should make foolish expenditure,—though as a matter fact only a very few can afford and actually do so—but why if agriculture were a profitable business he should not be able to find the wherewithal to incur expenses that others indulge in, without running into debt.

CHAPTER V

CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSALS

HAVING knocked the bottom out of the data relied upon by the Settlement Commissioner and the Settlement Officer, and having found that the "data in the reports, apart from rental and sale statistics, are obviously not sufficient to warrant either the general increases sanctioned in the maximum rates, or the much higher increases in the case of particular villages," they set about the task of making constructive proposals. They had before their mind the fact that the leased area which the Settlement Commissioner had maintained was up to 50 per cent. of the total cultivated area was really very small. The Officers' estimate of this, founded on considerable material gathered during the enquiry, is somewhere 'between one-ninth and one-twelfth.' In spite of this fact, which means that the rental data can by no means be said to be "considerable in volume" in the language of the Settlement Manual, the Officers came to the conclusion that rental data can afford almost "the only positive evidence accessible to the Settlement Officer in revising the assessments," and based their constructive proposals "more largely on these data than any other class of material." Having

rejected the Settlement Officer's statistical tables as entirely valueless, and our direct method of basing the assessment on the actual profits of cultivation as questionable or unreliable, and having not the time to collect sifted rental data for the whole taluka (which a Settlement Officer has to collect), there was one wise alternative before them. They might have said that the data in the existing reports were valueless, that the method suggested by the people's representatives indicating as it did a radical reduction in the existing rates, was unacceptable, and as they themselves had no time to collect data for the whole taluka, according to the method evolved by them, they had no option but to maintain the old rates and the old grouping. But they did not choose that alternative and proceeded to suggest revised rates with the accepted maxim of every Settlement Officer—'moderation in enhancement'!

In doing this they proceeded on the assumption that every case of genuine rent indicates the value of the agricultural profits that that sort of land must yield. It would seem agriculture without 'profits of agriculture' cannot be conceived by a Settlement Officer, for no one would be so foolish as to go on with a business which means to him certain loss! It was pointed out to them that was the unfortunate position of the Indian agriculturist, that he stuck to his land, because he had no other means, because it gave him and his family at least an opportunity to labour on and gain some kind of a wage, that if the primary agriculturist worked at a loss (in terms of business), the secondary agriculturist *i. e.*, the tenant who had no land of his own but leased it, worked at a greater loss, and that therefore strictly speaking there was nothing on which the Government might base their assessment on. This argument they brushed aside

without making a serious attempt to disprove the contention in one *single* case. They had no time at their disposal. Certainly they might have found time to go into at least *one* case. But they did not face the undertaking and held that "there is no doubt that the cultivator of a typical unit can, if he likes, maintain not only himself and his family but also his *dubla* and to a very large extent his cattle and buffaloes, out of the land, with only a very moderate amount of cash expenditure." *Ergo*, he must make profits, irrespective of the fact that his debt is ever accumulating!

But as it was no part of the Satyagrahi's case to fight the existing method of assessment or the existing law such as it was, the representatives co-operated most earnestly in assisting the Officers to find out the genuine rental data. That brings us to the method evolved by the Enquiry Officers for assessing the genuine rental data. We have seen in Chapter III how they decided to exclude certain rents entirely and to note certain down with remarks against them as to their true nature. Having done so they classified them according to their range, *i. e.*, according to their relation to the existing assessment, rents less than twice the assessment, more than twice the assessment, more than thrice, four times, and five times, excluding from these what seemed to *them* to be abnormally low or abnormally high and putting down against each village what they thought to be the normal range of a rent. Is the normal range already double the assessment? Then obviously the assessment does not bear an increase, because 50 per cent. of the profits is the maximum that Government have been claiming to charge all these years. If the normal range is more than double then it is capable of bearing some enhancement, and so on. How much allowance ought

to be made for the particular considerations governing each lease the Officers have not pointed out. They claim to have made *some* allowance, that's all. How one is to arrive at the normal leasing rate for each group of villages they have not indicated. For instance according to their own tables, in group I of Bardoli villages there are 25 dry crop leases with multiples of two and less than two, 21 with over three, 15 with over four, and 12 with over five; and 25 wet crop leases with multiples of two and less than two, 10 with over three, 2 with over four, 1 with over five. There is no indication as to which of them are the most regularly paid, and which of them are free from any special consideratians. How then do they indicate an increase in assessment? However ingenious the method may be, it is at best arbitrary, and most dangerous in the hand of a Settlement Officer bent on recommending an enhancement. How the method has worked out in the present case is shown in my detailed criticism of the new rates regarding each goup of villages.

It is noteworthy that the Enquiry Officers themselves have admitted more than once the paucity of the data. "*It is true*," they say, "*that these statistics cover far less than the whole of either taluka.*"

To confine ourselves only to Bardoli, let us see what the sentence we have italicised means. "Far less than the whole of the taluka" means in Bardoli 49 villages out of 137, and really speaking only 40 out of the 49 which were inspected, because rental statistics were available or inspected only in those 40, and more really speaking only 23 villages out of the 40, in as much as the data in the rest were, admittedly, 'too thin' to afford any suggestion of the normal rent per acre. In acreage the area of which the

statistics were examined was 1,610 acres out of the total of something over 1,20,000 acres, *i.e.*, a little over one per cent. of the total area. According to the Officers themselves the leased area in the taluka is something between one-eighth and one-twelfth of the cultivated area. The rental data on which they have based their proposals are admittedly scanty, to be precise a little over one per cent. of the total cultivated area, and at the most 8 to 10 per cent. of the total leased area. But in spite of the multitude of qualifications and conditions with which they have hedged in the reliance on the rental statistics, and in spite of "figures for single villages' being 'often too thin to convey any very definite meaning,' they "have found that the great amount of time and labour involved in the collection and compilation of these statistics has yielded valuable results."

Here is the table summarising the Committee's proposals regarding Bardoli:

Group	Old Rates: Dry Crop	Old Rates: Rice	New Rates before Satyagraha: Dry Crop	New Rates before Satyagraha: Rice	Rates proposed by the Committee: Dry Crop	Increase per cent.	Rice	Increase or Decrease per cent.
	Rs. a.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.		Rs. a.	
I	6 0	12 0	7 4	15 0	6 8	+ 8.3	12 0	...
II	5 0	10 8	6 0	13 2	5 8	+ 10.0	10 0	—4.8
III	4 0	9 0	4 12	11 4	4 12	+ 18.8	8 8	—5.5
IV	3 0	7 8	3 10	9 6	4 0	+ 33.3	7 8	...
V					3 4	+ 8.3	6 8	—13.3

6 out of 40 villages were lowered to Group II, 5 out of 32 villages to Group III, 12 out of 35 villages to Group IV and 27 out of 30 villages to Group V, the suggested new Group.

Let us examine the grounds on which they have justified these rates. It will be seen that for dry crop lands a general increase in all groups has been suggested. Even the new group V, which seems to have been devised to seperate some of the Kaliparaj villages, which on the face of them were very poor, has a dry crop rate which is higher than the old IV group rate.

As regards group I, let it be remembered that only 8 out of 40 villages were inspected and rental statistics in 3 villages were 'too thin' to suggest the mean yearly rent. Out of the remaining five, two showed very low multiples and one struck the Committee to be 'really a poor one.' Only *one* village Sarbhon seemed to the Committee 'to supply the best evidence' and showing 'that the incidence of assessment is not very high.' Let it be noted that the leases verified covered only one year 1927–28, and an area of 43 acres 26 gunthas out of an area of something over 2,000 acres. On this ground the dry crop rate for the whole group is increased by 8.3 per cent! The only one village which seemed to supply the best evidence also supplied the best evidence regarding the incidence of assessment on rice lands — 42 per cent. But that seemed to be no reason for reduction in the rice rate.

In group II, 11 out of the 32 villages were inspected, 4 of which indicated no statistics sufficient to suggest the mean rent. Nearly half of the high-multiple rents are contributed by two villages one of which has the qualifying factor of 'manuring before leasing.' "Leasing in this group is," again "to some extent affected by (1) grassland and (2) cotton speculation." But still the Officers think that "some increase of assessment is possible," and 'some' means 10 per cent.

In group III, 11 villages out of 35 were inspected, the statistics in four being "too thin" for any basis. Only one of the remaining seven has an incidence lower than 25 per cent., Vadhvania being affected by manuring and tractor-ploughing. In Uva the existing incidence is 35 per cent. And yet Uva and some other villages have appeared to the Officers "to be clearly ripe for some increase in their dry-crop assessment." Here "some" means 18 per cent.! Some of the villages are lowered to group IV, but the new group IV rate is the same as the old group III rate.

In group IV, 10 villages out of 30 were inspected, and four failed to indicate sufficient data. One village in the group accounts for nearly "one third of all" the high-multiple rents, and in two viillages, "the range of rents at the top is clearly extended by the Savkar's methods." And yet the Officers thought that the "figures of the group as a whole do not indicate over-assessment." *Ergo* they must be overassessed? 27 out of the 30 are considered to be worthy of being lowered to new group V as some of them are "the poorest in the whole taluka and peta," and yet the proposed dry crop rate for them is 4 annas more than the old IV group rate, and 3 villages in the taluka belonging to this group are thought to be prosperous enough to suggest an increase of 33 per cent. *i. e.*, a larger increase than even Messrs. Jayakar and Anderson had suggested! Let it be remembered that two of these three villages are Kaliparaj villages, which have come under our influence, and "where the work now being carried on by the social reformers from the Ashrams" appears in the opinion of the Commissioners, to be "promising"!

The rentals seem to have indicated a very high incidence as regards the rice lands and so a slight reduction has been suggested in two groups and a reduction of 13 per cent. in group IV. The Officers think that "the incidence of assessment on rice land is already so high that no general increase in the rice maximum rates can be justified. On the contrary, the figures show very clearly that the burden of assessment is not at present equally distributed between the two main classes of land and it becomes evident that the proper direction of the present revision will be to transfer the burden in some degree from one kind of land to the other." The way in which it has been transferred has, however, resulted in a net reduction of Rs. 3,834 only for rice and a net increase of Rs. 34,853 for dry crop! But I must close. Suffice it to add that among the traditions to which the Civil Service seems to be wedded, one is a belief in the theory that a reduction of assessment actually adds to rather than reduce impoverishment. The Officers quote with approval a passage from Mr. Fernandez, an old Settlement Officer, and repeat with added emphasis the proposition that they do not believe "that any lowering of the assessment below a fair standard rate would have any effect in curing it [indebtedness]."

CHAPTER VI

THE FRUITS

THE fruits of the ordeal through which the peasants of Bardoli passed and after having done so proved to an official committee that their complaints were substantially justified, were many and of a farreaching nature. However 'incurable' the local Government may be, the revelations made by the Committee opened the eyes of the Central Government. A conference of Revenue Members was at once summoned in Simla where one presumes their attention was drawn to a most damaging passage in the Committee's Report: "The established method of using the statistics is in our own opinion unsound in theory, and however it may work in practice in other districts, is not capable of giving satisfactory results in this part of Gujarat, where leases and sale transactions are affected by such a variety of disturbing factors." However cautious the phrasing of this conclusion, any one could read between the lines. All of them were naturally asked to put their houses in order, but Bombay had to bestir itself betimes. All the settlements directed by Mr. Anderson were based on the "established method" and possibly vitiated like Bardoli. There was a hue and cry in every taluka which was recently settled, with the result that though the Simla Conference did not end in anything definite the Government of Bombay were compelled to declare their intention of introducing legislation of a "sound" and "progressive" character and that

pending the legislation the old rates should continue where new settlements had not been already introduced. Whatever the Government may do or may not do, the peasant everywhere is now awake and determined to mend or end the existing unsound and wooden system. That is one of the many farreaching results of Bardoli.

The material results were not negligible. The enhancement fixed before the Enquiry for both the talukas was Rs. 1,87,492. It was reduced to Rs. 48,648 which means that the two talukas were relieved of a yearly burden of nearly one hundred and forty thousand rupees—if not more, for some of the recommended rates are strictly *illegal* and Government are themselves trying to remedy the illegalities! There are quite a number of minor recommendations in the Report regarding the existing anomalies in assessment and soil classification, apart from the rates. These are bound to result in some small gains for the peasants.

But even materially Bardoli had its repercussions on other provinces. In the Punjab remissions amounting to lakhs of rupees were given, and in the C. P. liberal suspensions of revenue were allowed.

It is impossible to exaggerate the moral results of the victory. It was recognised throughout India and even in the Empire that the peasant who is usually regarded as "a sack of meal" can organise himself and offer battle to a Government that persists until the last moment that it cannot be in the wrong. If the victory dealt a severe moral blow to British Government, it added to the moral stature of the peasant throughout the length and breadth of India. How it will prepare him for the bigger battle for Swaraj has yet to be seen.

The future is in the hands of God.



Appendices

APPENDIX I

Government Threats

1.

LANDS DISPOSED OF WOULD NEVER BE RETURNED

Over the signature of Mr. J. W. Smyth, Secretary to the Government, Revenue Department, the Government of Bombay issued the following notification on 31st May 1928 to the occupants of land in the Bardoli taluka and Valod mahal. The notification was distributed broadcast in Gujarati in the villages of the Bardoli taluka and was in confirmation of several threats issued already by the Collector:

The occupants of agricultural land in Bardoli Taluka and Valod Mahal with the assistance of persons who do not reside there, combind in February last to refuse to pay the revised assessment. The Settlement Officer had proposed an increase of 30 per cent. The Settlement Commissioner's recommendations involved an increase of 29 per cent. Government after the most careful enquiry and the fullest consideration of all the objections raised both by the cultivators and certain members of the Legislative Council fixed the rates at 20 per cent. in excess of those paid during the 30 years' currency of the previous settlement. Uptil the middle of April last the Revenue Officers confined their action to notices of demand and attempts at distraint. The latter were frustrated by organized evasion, the locking up of houses and threats to the Village Patels and Vethyas of boycott and excommunication.

Government then reluctantly resorted to the forfeiture of land and organised attachment of buffaloes and moveable property. Twenty-five Pathans were obtained to assist the Mamlatdar and Mahalkaris in the work of attachment and the care of animals attached. Unfounded allegations have been made against these Pathans. Government are satisfied that their conduct has been exemplary in every respect. They are being employed at headquarters to look after the buffaloes distrained, and also in parties of five to assist in making attachments under the eye of the Mamlatdar and the four Mahalkaris. The notion that five parties each of five Pathans working under the eye of a responsible officer of Government can terrorize a population of 90,000 persons as has been alleged in certain newspapers, is incredible. Nevertheless as soon as the threats to the Vethyas are withdrawn by the non-co-operation leaders and they are allowed to resume their lawful occupations, the necessity for retaining these Pathans will disappear, and they will be sent away.

The non-agriculturist defaulters have been served with notices of forfeiture accompanied by a special warning that their lands would be entered as Government unoccupied waste on expiry of the period of such notice and disposed of to persons applying for the occupancy as opportunity occurred; *and that lands once disposed of would never be returned to them.*

Up to date 1,400 acres of such land have been disposed of and about 5,000 acres more will be disposed of in due course unless the arrears due thereon be sooner paid.

Applicants, Hindus, Mahomedans and Parsis, many of whom reside in Surat District, are forthcoming for all this land. It is evident that these persons have no

apprehensions that the revised assessments are excessive and that they will be unable to pay them.

A very small area of land belonging to agriculturists with large holdings has been similarly dealt with.

Notices of forfeiture of land belonging to other agriculturists have been issued and in some cases proclamations of sale have been made. The area of land so dealt with is very considerable.

Government wish to draw the earnest attention of the cultivators of Bardoli and Valod to the above statements of fact. The non-co-operation leaders declared that Government would be afraid to forfeit any land and that if they did, no one would dare to come forward to take up the occupancy. They also said that no one would dare to purchase the buffaloes that had been distrained. These declarations have been proved to be entirely incorrect. They further stated that none of the land revenue would be paid. This statement is equally incorrect. Up to the present one lakh of rupees have been recovered by Government towards the realization of the total revenue of the Taluka and Mahal; that is, nearly one-sixth of the revenue has already been paid up. It is to be noted that in the neighbouring Taluka of Chorasi, where the revised rates are higher than in Bardoli and have also been introduced this year, over nine-tenths of the land revenue has been paid up.

Many of the payments in Bardoli and Valod have been received from occupants of all castes and creeds whose names have been kept secret by Government officers, so that they may not be harassed by excommunication, social boycott and fines, with which occupants who pay their lawful dues to Government have been threatened by the non-co-operation leaders.

Government believe that many more persons are anxious to pay and Government wish to give them full opportunity to do so, and so save them from loss of their land. They are therefore informed (i) that the Collector has the power to give exemption from the payment of one-fourth fine which is due from defaulters and that he will exercise this discretion in the case of persons who pay their land revenue on or befere June 19 and (ii) that payments may be made through any Government Officer, or by remittance to the Taluka, Mahal or Huzur Treasuries.

2.

YOU WILL REGRET A REINQUIRY!

This is an extract from Sir Leslie Wilson's reply to Sjt. K. M. Munshi, dated May 29th, 1928:

With regard to your remarks about an impartial enquiry, I am convinced myself that no further enquiry could elicit any further facts; and I may point out that an almost impossible position will be reached if, after the fullest enquiry, after the objections to any re-assessment have been received, and after these have all been carefully considered, another enquiry in every case of the re-assessment is to be undertaken. In addition to the consideration given to the Bardoli case mentioned in para 3 above, it is a fact, however, that a further enquiry has been made, for it so happened that Mr. Rieu, the Revenue Member, went on leave, and Mr. Hatch, a very experienced Revenue Officer, took his place. Mr. Hatch has gone through all the papers with an entirely independent mind, and has come definitely to the conclusion, leaving aside rental values altogether (a basis to which objection has been taken) that the increase of assessment proposed by Government is very low, and that Government is more than

justified, by the figures of prices, sales, etc. in increasing the assessment as it has done, and that, if any further enquiry were to be made, such enquiry would result in raising the assessment instead of lowering it. I can assure you that there is not one member of Government who is not fully satisfied as to the justice of Government's action—and, in fact, I should really use the word generosity.

3.

GOVERNOR'S ULTIMATUM

In the course of his opening speech in the Legislative Council on the 23rd July H. E. Sir Leslie Wilson said:

Honourable members are aware of the fact that I personally visited Surat as recently as last Wednesday, in the hope that such a settlement might ensue. No settlement was, however, achieved, and it is not possible for Government to delay any longer in making known its final decisions. Government is of opinion, and I feel sure that honourable members will agree, that any announcement on a matter of such importance as this should be made to the elected representatives of the people of the Presidency, more particularly in view of all that has happened during the past few months, and also in view of the vote taken on this question in the Budget Session. Not only is this the proper course to pursue, but it is the constitutional course, and I have endeavoured since I have been here to act entirely in the most constitutional manner possible. I therefore take this opportunity of putting before this honourable House the views of Government as to the present situation, and the definite and considered decisions of Government, which have been approved by the Government of India.

I say, with intention, that these decisions have been approved by the Government of India, because issues have been raised in Bardoli which have a very wide significance, and indeed it is common ground that this question has become one of all-India importance. So many speeches have been made by public men, and others, during the past few weeks on this subject, that it is not a surprising fact that some confusion of thought arises. My Government had always had it impressed upon them that the issue was a very clear one—namely, whether the re-assessment of the land-holders in the Bardoli taluka was a fair or unfair one. If, however, Government is to judge what the issue is on speeches and letters, which have been spoken and written lately, and on actions which have been and are being taken to interfere with the administration of the district, the issue might appear to be a much wider one—and, in fact, one which, in a sentence, is whether the writ of His Majesty the King-Emperor is to run in a portion of His Majesty's dominions, or whether the edict of some unofficial body of individuals is to be obeyed. That issue, if that is the issue, is one which Government is prepared to meet with all the power which Government possesses, and, by the decision of the representatives of the people of the district as to whether they accept or not the conditions which Government lay down before any enquiry can be promised, it will be clearly demonstrated what is the issue before Government and the people of this Presidency, and before the Government of India.

If the only question to be dealt with is the justice or injustice of the re-assessment, then Government is prepared to submit the whole case, after the revenue now due to Government has been paid, and

the present agitation entirely ceases, to a full open and independent enquiry as outlined in the statement which has been published. In making their proposals Government are anxious, above all things that the agriculturists of Bardoli taluka shall be relieved as soon as possible from the unfortunate situation in which they become involved as the result of the campaign against the payment of land revenue, the justice of which has been disputed by some honourable members of this House. I, therefore, on behalf of my Government put before honourable members the same proposals I put before those who came to see me at Surat as representatives of the cultivators of Bardoli taluka. Those proposals have been published, and it is not necessary for me to restate them but I must make it quite clear that they are not proposals put forward as a basis for compromise, but the definite and final decisions of Government. They are fair proposals, and must commend themselves to the mind of any moderate man. They contain certain conditions which must be fulfilled before any fresh inquiry can be promised and these conditions cannot be altered. I will mention one point only with regard to these proposals and that is with regard to the demand on the part of Government for the payment of the revised assessment. This is obviously a vital condition being a lawful and constitutional demand, the repudiation of which is both unlawful and unconstitutional. At Surat I was informed that the condition of the payment of the revised assessment would not be accepted and consequently no settlement was possible. I would, however, remind honourable members, especially those honourable members who are the elected representatives of the people

living in Bardoli taluka, that it is their constitutional right to speak on behalf of, and decide in the interests of, their constituents. Those honourable members and the honourable members of this House, must have, I am convinced, first of all in their minds the welfare of the agriculturists, and I sincerely trust that those interests will be the only ones which will actuate all honourable members in this matter. It is, of course, impossible for the present situation to continue, and a final decision must be arrived at as soon as possible. Government would therefore ask the honourable members concerned to communicate their decision as to whether or no they, on behalf of their constituents, accept or refuse the conditions which must be fulfilled before a fresh enquiry can be set up, to the Honourable the Revenue Member within fourteen days from to-day.

I cannot myself believe that, realising the consequences of a refusal—the grave hardship on the agriculturists, the bitterness of feeling which will be engendered, and the inevitable result of any conflict which must ensue between Government and the people concerned—these proposals will be rejected. It is, however, my duty to make it perfectly clear that, if these conditions are not accepted, and consequently a settlement is not secured Government will, in order that there shall be full compliance with the law, take what action they consider desirable and necessary, and will utilise all the powers at their command to ensure that the statutory authority of Government is maintained in every way. Neither the Government of Bombay nor any Government could tolerate a position in which private individuals attempt to put themselves above the law, or take part in organisations which have the effect of inducing others to do so. To permit that is the very negation of Government, and it is not

conceivable—whatever may be the consequences—that any Government, worthy of the name of Government in any country, would not take every step in its power to prevent, or to put a stop to any such action.

I have not made these remarks so that they might be considered in any way as a threat. Nothing is further from my mind. They are merely a statement of fact, but it was my obvious duty both to this honourable House and to the people of Bardoli taluka to make them, so that the position of Government cannot again be misinterpreted or misunderstood.

Indeed, there is no honourable member who will deny that there is a campaign of civil disobedience in Bardoli taluka at the present time, and it is perhaps unnecessary for me to remind honourable members that civil disobedience is an act of lawlessness—however convinced those who are participators in that act may be that their case is just, and lawlessness is none the less lawlessness because it may be fostered or encouraged by persons holding strong convictions, or because its practice may evoke from some men and women qualities worthy of a better cause. Moreover, it would be well that public opinion should clearly realise the inevitable consequences of disregard for law upon the structure of any political society. Once men can convince themselves that it is proper to set at nought the legally constitued executive authority whose duty it is to administer, then it is but a short step to challenge the title of the legislative body whose function it is to make the law, or to impugn the impartiality of the judiciary by whom the law is interpreted. Thus, respect for law is fundamental in every sphere of social life, and to seek to supersede it by the private will of any citizen or body of citizens is to head straight for anarchy.

APPENDIX II

THE SETTLEMENT DOCUMENTS

The Letters exchanged between the Surat M. L. C.'s and the Government recording the Terms of Settlement

1.

The following letter was addressed by the members of the Legislative Council representing Bardoli Taluka and Surat District to the Hon'ble the Revenue Member:

POONA, 6TH AUGUST 1928.

To

The Hon'ble The Revenue Member,

SIR,

With reference to your letter dated August 3rd 1928, we are glad to be able to say that we are in a position to inform Government that the conditions laid down by His Excellency the Governor in his opening speech to the Council dated 23rd of July will be fulfilled.

Yours sincerely,

Sd. A. M. K. DEHLAVI
Sd. BHASAHEB (Thakore of Kerwada)
Sd. DAUDKHAN SALEBHAI TYEBJEE
Sd. J. B. DESAI
Sd. B. R. NAIK
Sd. H. B. SHIVDASANI
Sd. M. K. DIXIT

2.

Announcement of the Enquiry

Government thereafter announced the following enquiry:

The enquiry will be entrusted to a Revenue Officer and a Judicial Officer, the decision of the Judicial Officer to prevail in all matters of difference between the two, with the following terms of reference:

To enquire into and report upon the complaint of the people of Bardoli and Valod

(*a*) That the enhancement of revenue recently made is not warranted in terms of the Land Revenue Code:

(*b*) That the reports accessible to the public do not contain sufficient data warranting the enhancement and that some of the data given are wrong;

and to find that, if the people's complaint is held to be justified what enhancement or reduction, if any, there should be upon the old assessment.

As the enquiry is to be full, open and independent, the people will be free to lead as well as test evidence before it with the help of their representatives including legal advisers.

3.

The following further letters were exchanged between the members of the Legislative Council representing the Bardoli taluka and the Surat district and the Hon'ble the Revenue Member:

POONA, AUGUST 7, 1928.

To
The Hon'ble the Revenue Member.

SIR,

Now that the principal point about the Bardoli question is settled satisfactorily we hope and trust that Government will

(*a*) Release all Satyagrahi prisoners,

(*b*) Restore all lands forfeited,

(*c*) Reinstate all Talatis and Patels who resigned their offices.

Yours sincerely,

Sd. A. M. K. DEHLAVI
Sd. DAUDKHAN SALEBHAI TYEBJEE
Sd. BHASAHEB (Thakore of Kerwada)
Sd. BHIMBHAI R. NAIK
Sd. H. B. SHIVDASANI
Sd. J. B. DESAI
Sd. M. K. DIXIT

4.

The following letter dated 7th August 1928 was addressed by the Hon'ble the Revenue Member to the above members of the Legislative Council:

Gentlemen,

With reference to your letter dated the 7th instant, Government, in exercise of their prerogative, will release all Satyagrahi prisoners and will be pleased to issue orders granting your second request.

The Talatis and Patels will be pardoned if they apply in the proper form.

Yours sincerely,

Sd. J. L. RIEU

N. B.—The price paid for the lands which were sold by Government and were transferred to R. B. Naik as stated in para 86 of the Report was about Rs. 11,000 or double the assessment in respect thereof. The excess of assessment thus received was also remitted by Government to the individual cultivators with the result that the land was restored to them without their being out of pocket to any extent.

APPENDIX III

CONCLUSIONS OF THE MUNSHI COMMITTEE

1. In some cases notices of forfeiture were not prepared and affixed according to law; in some cases, notices were affixed at wrong places; some notices were affixed long after the expiry of the period mentioned therein. The number of cases of irregular notices actually put before us is fairly large and drawn from different places in the taluka and indicate that irregularity was not restricted to any small area of the taluka.

2. Over 6,000 notices were issued against khatedars covering the bulk of the lands in Bardoli. These lands were quite disproportionate in value to the assessment recoverable in respect thereof, as the general value of lands in Bardoli according to Government reports is about 50 to 100 times the assessment recoverable therefrom. Such forfeiture is indefensible from either moral or administrative point of view.

3. Lands of the value of over Rs. 3,00,000 were disposed of for Rs. 11,000, under the drastic powers vested in the Executive for disposal of land. Such disposal of lands for assessment highly disproportionate in value was totally unjusifiable though technically correct.

4. In many cases proceedings for the distraints and sales of movable properties were illegal or irregular.

5. Numerous cases of breaking open the doors of dwelling houses, spread over different villages, show that the forcing open of doors was by no means the isolated action of a wayward officer but was resorted to as a matter of concerted policy. Doors of houses were broken open without any inquiry as to whether the door attempted to be broken or broken open was that of a khatedar.

6. There are numerous cases in which distraints were levied before sunrise and after sunset. These were a source of great harassment to the villages.

7. Articles such as cooking vessels, beds, etc., seeds, carts, and bullocks which are exempted from attachments were notwithstanding such exemption seized.

8. In numerous cases *japti* officers while levying attachments made no inquiry whether they were attaching the property of a defaulter khatedar or of any other person. In many cases as a matter of fact they seized the property of persons who were not liable to pay any land revenue whatever and the onus of showing that the property did not belong to a khatedar was invariably thrown on the non-khatedars whose property was wrongfully seized. In some cases even while selling the property so seized no attempt was made to find out as to whose property was being sold.

9. In numerous cases articles distrained were sold at gross undervalue and policemen and revenue peons were allowed to make bids and to purchase these articles at the auction sales.

10. The animals distrained were very severely beaten in most cases. While at the *thana* they were

not properly looked after in the sense that they were not properly fed or watered.

11. The employment of Pathans for *japti* among a peaceful people was unnecessary and unjustifiable. There is evidence to the effect that Pathans employed were guilty of indecent and improper behaviour and in at least one case, of molestation of a woman. In some cases the Pathans also committed small thefts. They were also guilty of ill-treatment of animals.

12. Government invoked the assistance of criminal law to punish the Satyagraha workers and to break the people's movement. In several cases the use of criminal law was unjustifiable and vindictive.

13. Government did not act fairly in appointing a subordinate revenue official as a magistrate to try and dispose of prosecutions which were launched and in installing a court in the heated atmosphere of Bardoli.

14. Government as prosecutors did not lead proper evidence and the process of identification was untrustworthy. The evidence on which these convictions were secured was one-sided and untrustworthy. Most convictions were at best for offences which were merely technical. In many cases the persons present on the spot were not called.

15. The Magistrate was wrong in not insisting on better evidence and in some cases has taken an incorrect view of law. In cases even of nominal offences Government asked for deterrent sentences. The Magistrate in most cases agreed with this view and imposed sentences which were out of proportion to the gravity of the offence.

16. The simultaneous and rigorous employment of the processes allowed by the Land Revenue Code

and other incidental activities like wholesale forfeiture, sales at gross under-value, disregard of procedure in cases of forfeiture, distraints and sales, the employment of Pathans, harsh treatment of cattle and their sales to butchers, posting of Pathans and police in front of the houses of khatedars for hours together, levying distraints, use of the criminal law and such other measures prove that the processes were worked harshly.

17. These measures were adopted harshly by Government in order to bring the highest possible pressure short of military occupation principally to induce the taluka of Bardoli to give up the Satyagraha movement. Government officials unjustifiably refused to believe that Mr. Vallabhhhai Patel and the Satyagrahis were fighting only a local economic issue. Thus Government adopted measures which were principally directed to the form of the movement as apart from the object thereof; which were drastic and oppressive far beyond the immediate needs of revenue collection; which did not regard the technicalities of law with scrupulous respect; which more often than not disregarded the consideration of general well-being towards the classes affected thereby; and which were directed to punishing those whom Government wrongly considered as having usurped their authority and to overawing those who had accepted the lead of the so-called usurpers. Thus we cannot but come to the conclusion that the measures adopted by Government were punitive and had for their object retribution and not mere revenue collection and as such were vindictive.

18. The rigorous employment of coercive measures consolidated the Bardoli taluka leading to the adoption of concerted action to counteract the activities of Government. The official activities led to the resigna-

tion of Talatis and Patels and attempts to persuade or threaten the villagers or village officers resulted in the adoption by the people of social boycott against waverers. As a result of official activities all normal work in the taluka was suspended.

19. As a result of the official activities cattle suffered very seriously in health, as will be seen from the following table:

Statistics available from 76 Villages of the Taluka

Total number of buffaloes	16,611
Buffaloes suffering illness	3,801
Total number of bullocks	13,091
Bullocks suffering illness	424
Inflammation and excoriation of skin	960
Pressure sores	92
Ulcerated and worm-eaten	2,155
Miscellaneous illness	1,018
Total number of deaths	93

20. People also suffered in health. Government Departments failed to take proper precaution to see that no injury was done to the health of the people as a result of their policy. The fact that the incarceration of the people was self-inflicted does not exonerate Government from their responsibility for the well-being of the people.

APPENDIX IV

THE ENQUIRY AND AFTER

The following is the text of the correspondence that passed between Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel and the Government of Bombay in respect of the report of the Broomfield Committee:

1.

Rectify Errors in the Report

Letter from Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel to the Hon'ble Sir J. L. Rieu, dated Simla, 24th June, 1929:

My colleagues and I have by this time made a careful study of the Broomfield Committee's Report, and we should now like to place before you and through you before H. E. the Governor our view in the matter. The feeling that is uppermost in our mind is one of gratification over the fact that the peasants' complaints have been held to be substantially justified but I should be untrue to myself and the peasants if I disguised the fact that the feeling is not unmixed with one of sore disappointment that the learned Commissioners should by their constructive proposals have done serious injustice to the villagers, which is made all the graver for their complete vindication. You will remember what I wrote to you in my letter subsequent to our meeting in Poona last October, and

I am bound to say that the constructive proposals of the Commissioners are by no means warranted by the evidence before them. I confess, however, that this injustice, however serious, is not wilful and may be even unconscious, and I therefore do not feel justified to seek any remedy other than that of submitting a representation to the Government pointing out the seriousness of the injustice and requesting them to rectify it by executive action.

I shall now proceed to state as briefly as I can, the grounds on which I characterise the constructive proposals as manifestly unjust. Some of them are general and some apply with particular force to individual cases. I forget for my present purposes the inherent iniquity of the rental theory, and submit my remarks assuming that the theory is sound. The general grounds are these:

1. The Commissioners have based their proposals solely on the rental data, in spite of their clear finding that "the proportion of the whole area of Bardoli taluka covered by the statistics would fall from the alleged figure of one-third to something between one-ninth and one-tenth" (Para 53 of the Report). This data can by no means be described in the language of the Settlement Manual as 'considerable in volume' so as to entitle the Commissioners to make them a basis for their proposals.

2. The proposals however, have been based not even on the scanty rental data available in the taluka, but on much scantier data collected by the Commissioners in respect of only 40 out of 137 villages in the Bardoli taluka, and in some cases on the data for one single year. In 17 out of these 40 villages the data according to the Commissioners themselves, were too thin to suggest the normal range of rents.

3. The reason for the enhancement of dry crop rates are in all cases flimsy where they are not vague and the percentage of increase absolutely arbitrary. Here are a few samples of the language used by the Commissioners in justification of their proposals: "Of all the villages in Group I, Sarbhon supplies the best evidence, and shows that some increase of assessment is possible" (Some here meaning 10 per cent.); "The group of villages represented by this and Vadhwania are clearly ripe for some increase in their dry crop assessment" (Some here means 18.8 per cent.); "The figures of the group as a whole do not indicate over-assessment."

Thus in Group I, the rental data for one village Sarbhon for one year (1927-28) have been considered to supply the best justification for an increase of 8 per cent. in the dry crop rate, and whilst in the other groups a feeble attempt has been made to set off the dry crop enhancement by a reduction in the rice maximum rates, no such attempt has been made here, though the percentage of rice assessment in the particular village held to afford the best evidence indicated a reduction.

In Group II having in view the circumstances admittedly affecting leasing, one fails to see how "some increase of assessment is possible."

Group III affords an instance of the most arbitrary and capricious increase in the maximum rates. Out of 11 villages 5 villages indicate no data whatsoever (as Appendix E shows) and all of them have been recommended for an increase of 18 per cent. Uva which already bears assessment which is 37.3 per cent. of the rental has been recommended for a similar increase.

Many of the villages in Group IV have been brought down to Group V, because they "do not indicate over-assessment," and among which there are "none in which an appreciable rise of assessment would be justified" and some of which are the "poorest in the whole taluka and Peta" (P. 76) and yet an increase of 8·3 per cent. has been recommended.

4. If the rental data were to be made the sole basis for the assessment, it was incumbent on the Commissioners to collect genuine data for all the villages. The villages inspected by the Commissioners were mostly those which were supposed to have a high rental multiple and it is not unlikely that if other villages had been inspected they would have revealed low rental multiples necessitating a reduction even in the rates. That, however, I admit is problematical. Having found that Mr. Jayakar's statistics failed to afford any reliable evidence of value, and that it was not possible for them to collect correct data affording such reliable evidence in respect of all villages, the least that the Commissioners could and should have done was to leave the villages they had not inspected and found any data for, undisturbed.

5. 35,611 acres out of the net assessed area in Bardoli are under grass which the Commissioners found "was nowhere exported for sale." The enhancement in the dry crop rates cannot be held to be justified in respect of this large grass area, for any reasons whatsoever.

I now come to some individual cases which have been hit much harder than the rest.

1. By far the most flagrant injustice has been done to three villages Ambach, Vedchhi and Degama, whose dry crop rates have been increased by 33 per cent. All

of them are poor Kaliparaj villages. Two of these were inspected and though the pitch of rents was high, as the Commissioners themselves have remarked "in some *savkar*-ridden villages such as Ambach and Degama" "the pitch of rents is materially affected." It may be noted that Vedchhi (which was not inspected) and Ambach are the centres of our rural uplift work in the Kaliparaj area—work which has been favourably noticed by the Commissioners—and the enhancement comes with peculiarly ill grace and as a penalty for the work which might some day raise the villagers from the level of '*savkar*-riddenness.'

2. Eight villages—Afva, Akoti, Kantali, Khoj, Palsod, Pardi Kadod, Kuva, Samthan, in Group II have been picked out for special treatment as regards their rice crop rate. Whilst they remain in Group II for dry crop they have been raised to Group I for rice crop. Why 6 villages out of 137 should have different groups for dry crop and rice crop, it is difficult to see. Only 4 out of these were inspected (Afva, Palsod, Pardi Kadod and Samthan), 3 indicated no data, and in Pardi Kadod the data were "affected by the practice of manuring before leasing." Moreover rice is grown mainly for local consumption, and even where it is sold the price is "exactly what it was in 1914." One fails to see, therefore, why this special treatment should have been meted out to these villages. Afva's is the worst case of all inasmuch as a large area of tank lands which grow no rice but are held as reservoirs of water are subject to the same assessment as the rice growing *kyari*.

3. The case of five villages (Delwada, Kamalchhod, Orgam, Sejwad, Singod) in Group III which indicated no data whatsoever has been already mentioned as also Uva which is particularly anomalous.

4. A lower group—Group V—has been thought fit to be created for Kaliparaj villages which are the poorest in the taluka. The rate however instead of being lowered has been raised by 8 per cent.

But I shall bring my letter to a close. I have confined my remarks to Bardoli. I could speak at the same length about the villages in Chorasi where a high maximum rate already presses too hard on the poor peasantry. The rental data are there no doubt larger in volume, but the other general remarks about Bardoli apply with equal force to the villagers in that taluka, and the least the Commissioners could have done was to leave the villages undisturbed. There are in that taluka some cases of particularly anomalous grouping and rating which I am asking Rao Bahadur Bhimbhai to bring to your notice.

To conclude, even the the dry crop maximum rates in both the talukas are capable of considerable reduction and the rice maximum rates of a much larger reduction than has been recommended. But if that is not done, I hope and trust that Governmant will maintain the old rates in both the talukas in view of the fact that the report apparently opens up the question of all revision settlements made during the recent years, and points to the necessity of deferring consideration of them until legislation laying down the procedure of making revision settlements comes to be passed. But if that did not come, the least that the Government owe to the villages is to remedy the injustice in case of villages which have had to suffer particular hardship.

Should you think it necesary that we should meet, I should be glad to wait on you.

2

Reminder

Second letter dated Ahmedabad, July 18, 1929, from Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel to Sir J. L. Rieu.

This is to remind you that I am still without even an acknowledgment of my letter of the 24th ultimo. The Government's letter to Mr. Shroff, M. L. C. prompts me to send you this reminder. Whilst I tender my congratulations to His Excellency for the decision conveyed in the letter to Mr. Shroff I have not been able to follow the exception made in the cases of Bardoli and Chorasi being enhanced, whatever happens to the other places. I appreciate the decision. But if it means that Bardoli and Chorasi cannot receive the benefit, if any of the revisions that may follow the passing of any legislation, you will grant that it would be a serious injustice to the people of the talukas. I contemplate no such result, but I merely wish to point out that the language in which the Government decision is worded is capable of the inference I have drawn. As has been pointed out in my letter of the 24th ultimo, even the enhancement recommended by Messrs. Broomfield and Maxwell has been arrived at in error and that in some cases if that recommendation is carried out grievous injustice will be done to the ryots. The people are getting somewhat restive, I have told them that I am in communication with Government. I would therefore like you, in view of the publication of the letter to which I have referred, to expedite your reply, including a clearance of the doubt raised in this letter.

3.

Government's Apologia

Sir J. L. Rieu's reply to the two letters, dated 3, Queen's Gardens, Poona, 21st July, 1929:

Dear Mr. Patel,

I write to acknowledge the receipt of your two letters dated the 24th June and the 18th instant respectively.

I regret the delay which has occurred in replying to the former letter. It was due to the time required for examining the cases of the particular villages referred to therein in order that I might satisfy myself as to the correctness or otherwise of your assertion that 'serious injustice' has been done to the land-holders of these villages by the Committee's constructive proposals applicable to them.

This detailed examination having been made, I regret that I find myself unable to concur in your contention. I consider that, in the light of the considerations and data brought forward in the Committee's Report, the treatment of the particular villages to which you refer, can be fully justified from the point of view of the interests of their land-holders.

Turning to the more general criticisms advanced in your letter, with reference to your paragraphs (1), (2) and (4) under this head, I would observe that it is nowhere stated in their Report that the Committee's proposals are based solely on rental data. On the contrary a large part of the Report is directed towards showing why rental data cannot be considered entirely by themselves and how their indication, whether scanty or not, can most safely be used. I would invite your attention more particularly to paragraphs 90 and 122 of the Report.

As regards your paragraph (3), it is expressly mentioned in the Report (para 93) that the figures appearing in the appendices are not repeated in the text. If the figures given in report and its appendices, taken together with the discussion in the former, do not convey to you their intended purport, I am afraid that no further explanation would be useful.

As regards your paragraph (5), grass leases were always noted as such by the Committee at the time of their inspection, and value was based on them according to circumstances (para 32 of the Report). The fact that grass is not exported for sale does not deprive it of its value any more than, in the case of cereal crops, does the fact that they are consumed locally. The existence of value is demonstrated by the leases themselves.

In conclusion, I would observe that notwithstanding the fact that the Committee's specific proposals entailed a large reduction of the land revenue as determined by the sanctioned revision settlement, Government accepted these proposals in their totality unhesitatingly and without reference to the question whether or not the considerations on which this reduction of revenue was based were valid and so acceptable to that extent. In the circumstances, they consider that they are entitled to expect the same degree of acceptance on the part of the land-holders, and they are not prepared to re-open the whole question of the present settlement as, in justice to themselves, they would have to do if modifications of it solely from the point of view of the land-holders were now introduced in it.

4.

Rectify Palpable Errors

Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel's reply to the above:

I thank you for your letter of the 21st July. I have no desire to ask Government to re-open the whole question as you have put it, not because the ryots have anything to fear from any such re-opening. But I recognise that there must be some finality in such matters. What I have asked is what is always done even in final awards in arbitration cases, namely, rectification of palpable errors unconsciously committed by arbitrators. My submission is that I have brought to the notice of the Government such errors in a report which is otherwise worthy of high praise for the impartial labours that Messrs. Broomfield and Maxwell have put into the enquiry. But it is a painful injustice when it is brought to their notice only by way of prayer. It is hardly a healthy sign that the ryots should always have to resort to direct action to bring home to Government even cases of apparent injustice and hardship. As I have no desire to put the ryots to the hardships of any further struggle I must submit to what is in my opinion an obvious injustice.

Your letter is silent—perhaps deliberately—as regards an important point raised in my second letter. May I assume that Bardoli and Chorasi will not be denied the benefit, if any, of the proposed new legislation? I should be thankful to have my assumption confirmed by you.

5.

No Undertaking Possible

Letter dated 8th August 1929, Poona, from Sir J. L. Rieu to Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel:

I write in reply to your further letter of the 2nd instant.

If I may be permitted to say so, your statement of the case simply begs the question. You contend that Government ought to rectify palpable errors unconsciously committed by the members of the Committee and so redress instances of palpable injustice. This might perhaps be admitted as a purely general proposition, but I fail to see that it has any practical application to the present particular case. Your contention is based on the assumption the justification for which I must decline to admit. And, further you assume that all such errors must necessarily be errors that operate adversely to the interests of the land-holders. You overlook the possibility of the existence of similar errors that would operate adversely to the rights of the State. That involves another assumption which I regret I am unable to admit as being valid.

With regard to the point raised in the concluding paragraph of your letter, I think it must be evident both from His Excellency the Governor's pronouncements and from my speech during the debate in the Council on the resolution moved by Mr. Pataskar, M.L.C., that Government are not prepared at present to give an undertaking that the revision settlements of the Bardoli and Chorasi talukas as modified by the acceptance by Government of the Committee's recommendations, will be further revised in the light of such land revenue legislation as may at some future date be passed by the Council.

6.

I May Revive Satyagraha

Letter dated Ahmedabad, 14th August 1929 from Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel to Sir J. L. Rieu:

I must now refrain from entering into further argument with you in connection with what appear to me to be palpable errors in the otherwise estimable report of Messrs. Broomfield and Maxwell. Though the Government did not accept my suggestion that the report should be, in so many words, binding on either party, I know that in this matter of the errors, I dare not enter upon a Satyagraha struggle with the Government. It would be inconsistent with my profession of what to me is a grand doctrine.

With reference to the other part of the letter, I regret the attitude the Government seem to have taken up. As to that my course is absolutely clear and I hereby beg to give the Government notice that should the contemplated settlements arising out of the proposed new legislation be beneficial to Bardoli and Chorasi if it was made applicable to them, in justice to these poor cultivators, I would be bound to press for retrospective effect being given to such legislation so far as these talukas are concerned, even though it may be at the risk of a revival of Satyagraha.

I take it that you have no objection to our correspondence being made public.



INDEX

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तथि	संख्या	तिथि	संख्या